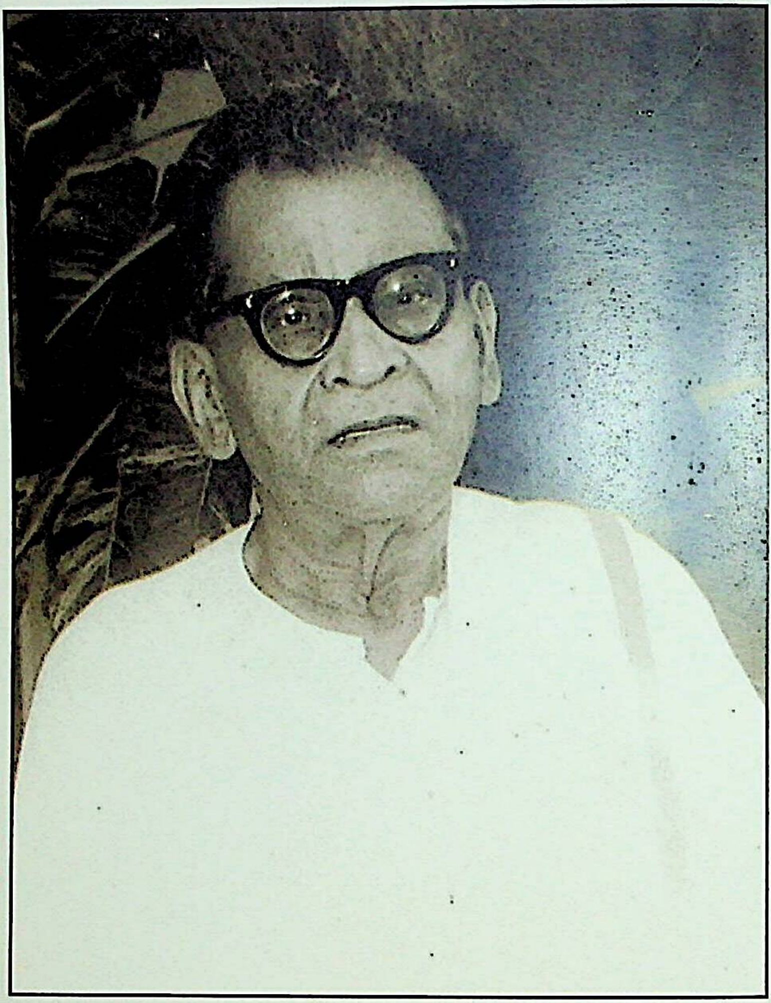
Suniti Kumar Chatterji Memorial Lecture

Medieval Indian Legacy

Linguistic and Literary

Indra Nath Choudhuri

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts
New Delhi



Prof. Suniti Kumar Chatterji (1890-1977)

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Monograph prepared for delivering the Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji Memorial Lecture on 6th May 2011 at IGNCA

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Preface

Let me first express my gratitude to IGNCA for the invitation which they gave me to deliver the most prestigious Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji Memorial Lecture, and now for publishing the lecture. What I came to know from the letter of Dr. V.S. Shukla of the Kalakośa Division that over the years these lectures were delivered mostly by well-known linguists like Professor S.K.Verma, Professor D.P. Pattanayak, Professor S.R. Banerjee, Professor Vidya Niwas Mishra and Professor Uday Narayan Singh. I am not a linguist but a comparatist and that might have prompted the authorities to invite me particularly when Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji himself wrote a very seminal book on 'Languages and Literatures of India'. The topic of my presentation was one of my choice, 'The Medieval Indian Legacy: Linguistic and Literary'.

Let me state in this preface that Dr. Shukla's letter trapped me quite well, which mentioned, among other things, and I quote, "We are planning to print the proposed lecture in the form of a monograph." A monograph in Sahitya Akademi means a text of minimum 80 A4 pages and the result was that I prepared a text of a lecture of 80 to 85 pages, which could not have been presented within the time allotted to me. Thus, I made a summary of it and planned to present the shorter version of my lecture. The monograph is the original bigger version of the shorter lecture which I delivered at IGNCA on 6th May 2011.

I am grateful to Dr Kapila Vatsysyan for finding time to chair the lecture.

I had two little associations with Suniti *babu*. One, he was examiner of my Ph.D. thesis along with Pt. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi and Professor Devendra Nath Sharma.

Secondly, he was kind enough to accede to my request and write an introduction to my thesis when it was published in 1966 as *A Comparative Study of Modern Bengali and Hindi Poetics*.

Professor Chatterji was a great linguist and his book *Origin and Development of Bengali Language (ODBL)*, first published in 1926, was priced Rs. 20, which, within a short time, became such a sought-after book that the old copies were resold for Rs. 500 till it was re-printed. He once accompanied Tagore on his tour to Singapore and Malay in 1927 and for one of his lectures Tagore said, "I am tired. This is the fourth lecture I am asked to deliver in one day and hence I shall ask my young friend S.K. Chatterji, who has accompanied me to this place, who is a great scholar known not only in India, but in Europe, and who has the strength of youth and much of wisdom, to speak on my behalf and that too in Hindi." Suniti *babu's* age that time was just 37.

I shall mention two more things about him. One, as President of Sahitya Akademi from 1969 to 1977, he was responsible in giving the Akademi's recognition to Maithili, Manipuri and Konkani languages. His idea was that each and every language has the potentiality to develop itself and our effort should be to encourage these languages. India always believed in the diversity of existence with many languages, cultures and religions and that gives India its vitality.

Secondly, the most important characteristic of his approach to linguistics was his emphasis on the pre-Aryan substratum in the Aryan speech. In his book *Indo-Aryan and Hindi*, he had proved that much of the literature of Sanskrit, particularly the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, is based, nonetheless, on a translation substratum from the literatures of Indo-Aryan languages, which included the languages of born Aryans, mixed Aryans, non-Aryans and foreign speakers, who spoke Greek and old Persian. When Sanskrit attained pan-Indian prestigious position, its speakers became reluctant to disclose the translated character of its literary substratum.

I heard him speaking on Slavic Languages in Delhi University in 1969. I could never imagine that a purely linguistic topic dealing with foreign languages could be presented so interestingly. He had a sharp memory and gave innumerable references in his lecture which he remembered by heart.

Suniti *babu* once mentioned in his foreword to his book *World Literature and Tagore* that in his case as a professor of linguistics, which is generally considered a dry subject of study, he had the temerity to set forth his own views on literature. Similarly, I, being a comparatist, ventured to enter into an area which dealt with languages on which, though, the edifice of literature is created. I hope my readers may like to encourage me for plunging into an area, which is at least not unchartered for me.

I thank all my colleagues of IGNCA and its editor, Dr. Advaitavadini Kaul and also Shri V.B. Pyarelal, Joint Secretary for their help and cooperation in the publication of this monograph.

June, 2012 **Indra Nath Choudhuri**

Medieval Indian Legacy

Linguistic and Literary

The medieval age of India was a vibrant era of immense changes and consolidation coupled with fervent activities, practically in every field of human enterprise. We see, on one side, the rise and fall of dynasties, emergence of new languages, the downfall of Buddhism, the growth of new philosophy of *bhakti* (devotion) and also the various schools of Indian philosophy, including the rise of systematic interpretations of *Brahma Sutras* of Vadarayana or its Vedantic interpretations by Shankaracharya in the 9th century; also the re-establishing of the Vedas and the Vedic way of life on a stronger foundation with the help of a fresh interpretation of the texts. It was the time when cultural influences that came with Muslim invasions integrated with the culture and tradition of India like the religio-philosophical influence of Sufism representing the inward or esoteric side of Islam and mythical dimension of Muslim religion.

On the other side, the medieval Indian period, marked by the presence of many Hindu dynasties and the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire between 6th and 12th centuries and also from 13th to 16th centuries, respectively, stood witness to a remarkable degree of cultural exchange between the Huns, Sakas, Scythians and Kushans and Hindus, and also Hindus and Muslims. The Huns, Sakas, Scythians and Kushans came with their culture, influenced and enriched the ancient Hindu culture, in turn, they were also inversely influenced by it and in due course were adopted in the existing Hindu culture. But with respect to Muslim culture, it was more of an exchange and assimilation in their respective cultures. It is well known, just to cite one example, that Indian classical music had deeply influenced their musical traditions and that Mughal architecture had left a lasting impression upon the Hindu traditions of building. The two were poles apart in their religious and political ideologies, but the intense give-and-take among their poets and mystics—the *Sants* and the Sufis—in a land, whose people were in the habit of singing their poetry, had led to a period phenomenally rich in the creative arts. The political tension and struggle between the Mughal rulers and the Indian kings appear to have lent the phenomenon just that extra edge of a 'catalyst'. Indeed, these major defining factors had truly been acting as the key governing factors to the ushering in of medieval literature in the Indian scenario, which was to bloom forth into distinctive genres. Indeed, medieval Indian literature was a gradual and matured culmination towards modernity under the British Empire, as can be comprehended by going through the modern history of India.

In the medieval time, before the Mughal period, politically, the country did not have any centre of power.

After the disintegration of the Gupta Empire, the Maukharis ruled the Ganges valley with Kanyakubja as their capital. They were soon destroyed and the next king of great name and fame was Harshavardhana who, although ruled for a short period from AD 606-647, but ruled competently. He himself was a playwright and a patron of poetry. After his death, his empire also declined with him. The succeeding periods witnessed rise of many new dynasties, who ruled over different areas of northern India for short periods. Some of them, however, acclaimed distinction, such as the Palas of Bihar and Bengal, the Rastrakutas of the Deccan, and the Gurjara-Pratiharas, who ruled parts of Malwa and Rajasthan.

In South also, there was hardly much stability for a longer stretch of time. For a period of three hundred years from the middle of the sixth century, the history of South India, in the words of Nilakantha Shastri (Shastri 1975: 133), "was virtually the story of mutual conflict among four powers each seeking constantly to extend its empire at the expense of its neighbours. The powers were the Colas of Kaveri, Calukyas of Badami, the Pallavas of Kanchi and the Pandyas of Madurai."

By AD 1191, the Muslim power was firmly established in North India but surprisingly there was no effect on the literature of the period and hardly any reference of the Muslim invasion. This has been often described as lack of historical sense. Sisir Kumar Das (Das 2005: 26) writes on this, "It is not that the creative writers were not concerned about the present but they refused to be the prisoner of temporality. They were more concerned about the human conditions in general rather than the specifics. They wrote with a sense of unfragmented time ever flowing and renewing itself, where the present was only a tiny part."

PERIODIZATION

Any effort towards periodization of Indian history is fraught with danger and is always problematic. In this regard, D.D. Kosambi (Kosambi 2002: 49-50) in his critique of the Soviet Indologist D.A. Suleykin (Suleykin 1954) had this to say:

> India is a not mathematical point but a large country, a subcontinent with the utmost diversity of natural environment, language, historical development. Neither in the means of production nor in the stages of social development was there overall homogeneity in the oldest times. Centuries must be allowed to pass before comparable stages of productive and social relationships may be established between the Indus valley, Bengal, and Malabar. Even then, important differences remain which makes periodisation for India as a whole almost impossible, except with the broadest margin.

It is important to remember that modern history writing in India began with the coming of the British. When the British came to India, they found that there was no literature in India which approximated to what they thought was history—a linear teleological notion of history. Instead, what they found were mythological stories, folklore and religious texts where time is not always linear but is sometimes cyclical and where there is no clear narration of events. So the British basically believed that India was ahistorical, that Indians had no sense of history. Alexander Dow in *The History of Hindostan* (Dow 1792) asserted that India had an abundance of history (as the past) but little history (as the narrative of the past). What they couldn't understand was that these ancient texts were a combination of different kinds of time and they didn't know how exactly to use and read these texts. Also, there was in India another body of literature which they completely ignored, i.e., oral literature. The Indian narrator of the oral culture describes events for the exteriorisation of the worldly process, and therefore selects a vantage point in the time past or the time present and the future, which enables him to frequently change his axis in time as well as in space. This mobility gives him a holistic vision; times turn circular for him, and he talks with his total existence which may be described as orchestration of all the senses. On the contrary, written culture is based on a cause-and-effect phenomenon, has a linear development, and deals primarily with visual symbols, fixity is its main characteristic. On the other hand, oral culture does not believe in fixity. Till we reach the modern period, oral word more than the written word, i.e., manuscripts (now, books) was used for transmission of knowledge, communication of the message of the sacred was transmitted through poetry. Both oral and written words served as instruments of communication and dialogue between different levels of society and across regions but it would be fallacious, however, as explained by A.K. Ramanujan (Ramanujan 1989: 187-216), to assume a notion of linear development between the written and the oral or classical and folk. It is more profitable to imagine a history of texts that is made up of written and oral forms contained within cycles of transmission that move up and down through time resulting in manifold possible recompositions within a 'simultaneous order' of texts. Aditya Malik (Malik 2010) reiterates the 'simultaneous order' of oral and written tradition and says that oral tradition in the Indian context is not restricted to folk tradition and folklore. While folklore and folk narratives are indeed recited, spoken, sung and performed, orality itself is not confined to folk traditions. In fact, in classical and Sanskrit traditions one finds a prevalence of the oral word, in spoken and sung form, both in an epistemological sense—sound as vibration (*nada*) carries knowledge and metaphysical meaning as well as ritual efficacy (*mantra*) in a performative sense. Many Sanskrit texts, for example, the *Puranas* and the *Mahatmyas*, use narrative framing devices that involve a speaker and an audience in dialogue with one another. Even more so, several important Hindu religious texts, such as the *Rgveda* and the two great epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, were not only orally recited and transmitted for millennia, but once written, as is the case with the latter two texts, continued to show signs of having originated out of a possibly oral 'core' that coalesced into their current written form. Kapila Vatsyayan (Vatsyayan 2011), by taking the cue from a *shloka* of the Upanishads, rounds up the issue by stating that the oral and the written are two birds on the same branch: if the oral is sacred, so also is the written word.

This confused the British in their periodization of Indian history. However, they, according to their own understanding of periodization of history, loosely divided Indian history into different periods—ancient, medieval, and modern or the British period. Now the problem with this sort of periodization was that they described the ancient period as a golden period in Indian history, and the medieval period as a dark age. It is not difficult to see why they did this—the British wanted to represent themselves as the saviours of India, that they were the ones who rescued India and brought to it the benefits of Western Civilization. When one goes through the content of the second anniversary discourse in 1794 to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, where Sir William Jones (Jones 1784: 406), in search of the history of India, makes a comment that he would go to remote antiquity but restrict his researches downwards only up to 11th century, one realizes that Edward Said's attempt to view Western literary approaches to the East in terms of political discourse cannot be ignored completely. Jones' statement has two hidden meanings:

First, that pre-British India had no history. It was the dark period of India and with the advent of British, the darkness faded;

In the process, Jones tried to obliterate a part of the history of India, medieval *bhakti* period, which was, in fact, the golden period of India and as a result created historigraphical inversions by wiping out a portion from its history to suit his hidden agenda.

John Drew (Drew 1987: 46) in his book *India and the Romantic Imagination* presents a similar view about Jones that the curious way in which Jones is absorbed in Asian Civilization even while he asserts the superiority of the Europeans is equally evident in his work, including *On the Philosophy of the Asiatics*. In his perspective on India, Drew says that Jones sometimes appears to have been as hedged in as any man by his sense of the superiority of European culture and by his acknowledgement of the prior claims of Christian revelation. But when George Abraham Grierson came into contact with the insightful depth of medieval Indian literature, especially Hindi devotional poetry, he was absolutely bewildered and in response said (Grierson: 1889) that all of a sudden, like the flash of lightening, a new idea surfaced over the darkness of old religious beliefs.... No Hindu knows from which source this new idea materialized and also no one could establish with certainty the reason of its manifestation (Dwivedi 1940: 38). The darkness of religious beliefs is an expression which tallies with the notion of the conventional historians that medieval India is all 'dark ages' comparable to the 'dark ages' of Europe. But we all know that medieval India with its multiple flowerings in different fields of human expressions like architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance and, above all, poetry is the golden period of Indian art and literature. It is in this context that Hazari Prasad Dwivedi convincingly asserts by alluding to Grierson that it was not all of a sudden like a flash of lightening things start happening but for hundreds of years, *the clouds* gathered for rains to take place. In addition, there was the crossing of boundaries of hierarchies to interconnect the tribal and folk conventions/regional distinctions (*pravritti*) with the erudition of *shastra*-oriented epistemology of *acharyas* and concrete Pauranic imaginative narrations, and establish the complementariness of these two traditions of *loka* and *shastra* and also their interdependence on each other (Dwivedi 1940: 38). It was not only crossing but interrogating and, sometimes, subverting the boundaries of hierarchies.

Among the Indian scholars and historiographers, this idea of loosely dividing the Indian history into ancient, medieval and modern periods has taken roots but the problem still persists since there are many like Al Badaoni (or Badauni) who worked as a historian in the court of Akbar, and who, in his literary historiography *Muntakhabhu-'l- Tawarikh* (AD 1556-1605), does not accept the responsibility of introducing periodization in his history. This is not to say that he was not sensitive to historical changes in literary style and function of literature, as explained by G.N. Devy (Devy 2009: 67). Devy says; on the contrary, that he was so acutely conscious of the changes taking place during the period of his narrative that he made that awareness his chief justification for writing the history:

> I shall now explain what it was that originally led me to collect these fragments. Since a complete revolution, both in legislation and manners, greater than any of which there is any record for the past thousand years, has taken place in these days...(*Muntakhabh* Vol. III)

Badaoni's history does not use 'period', 'genre', 'canon' or 'language' as principles of literary history. It uses, on the other hand, 'sect' as the central principle. Within it are subsumed such categories as 'oral', 'written', 'marginal', and 'central', etc. These principles are not entirely different from the principles of historiography employed by the Hindu and other non-Muslim *panths* in medieval India. The *Pancavati,* an anthology of the poets of Dadu Panth (now critically edited by German scholars W.M. Callewaert and Bart Op de Beeck) includes songs by Dadu, Kabir, Namdev, Raidas and Hardas and avoids 'period', 'language', 'canon' and 'genre' as principles of classification. It attempts a total integration between the written and the spoken and also the *ragas* in which each of the songs is ascribed. With the separation between the oral and the written occurring sometime in the 17th century and emergence of new cannons of literature, the sense of literary history changed and the split between the spoken and the written was dramatically enhanced and quickened by the introduction of printing technology; we became prone to accept the periodization of the colonial historiographers and to write our literary history on the basis of written documents available with us of the medieval Indian languages and literature.

However, stray examples can be found of following the old Indian pattern of historiography as is evinced in the book *The Indian Poetic Tradition* by Sachchidananda Vatsyayan and Vidya Niwas Misra. Both the scholar-writers speak of certain strands of Indian literature, particularly of ancient and medieval time which do not allow the history of literature of that time to be bound in strict chronology:

1) It is absolute faith in the uttered word or *vak* or *kalyani vak* (benign speech) repeatedly reaffirmed in successive

periods, which turns the poet or *kavi* into the human counterpart of the creator and as a result the language becomes identical to illumination and all-encompassing state of timelessness.

2) The second strand of unity is release from history of ancient and medieval literature consisting of the Vedas, Upanishads, *Ramayana, Mahabharata* or *Itihasa* and *Purana* or devotional poetry. All these works have a reinterpretative or recreative role which strictly pushes chronology into the background and demonstrates a self-renewing, eternalizing aspect which appealed to the human mind. It rejected chronological order in deference to aesthetic order, e.g., the *Mahabharata* is regarded as a successor to the *Ramayana*. As a result, the ingenuity of successive generations of poets in introducing new motifs in the legends of great mythological figures, such as Shiva, Rama, Krishna, etc. changed from one *Purana* to another, from one poem to another, involving a direct realisation of living presence and yet seen as perceptions of eternal entities.

This essential unity and the significance of this view of time do not allow any kind of chronological order to be followed in writing the history of ancient and medieval Indian literature. Though convenient tags like the Vedic period, Epic period, Classical period or Devotional period are used, yet knowing well that there cannot be any rigid sequentiality in them, the best bet would be to divide loosely the Indian history into three periods—ancient, medieval, and modern. However, one should keep in mind that the word medieval, as explained by Hazari Prasad Dwivedi (Dwivedi 1998: 24–49), is not to be found in Sanskrit heritage and what we now want to call medieval does not mean an age of stupefaction and frustration but an age of devotion to god, leading to freedom of mind and a life of blissfulness.

However, there is a big difference of opinion about the time of the medieval period. While fixing the time of the medieval period of Indian literature, one does not find any similarity of opinion among the historiographers of Indian literature. The literary scene in India in that period is overwhelmingly diverse, which not only stretches across great periods of time and an enormous area, but is also composed in many languages. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, thus, opines that the period from AD 1150-1800 covers the medieval period of Indian literature from Kashmiri to Tamil and Marathi to Assamese. This period varies from language to language, e.g., if medieval Hindi literature stretches from AD 1300 to 1800, Tamil's medieval period starts early from AD 1000, Kannada from AD 1150 and both, like the literature of other languages, continue up to AD 1800. This uneven beginning does not in any way undersize varied and wide spectrum of thought and expressions, though sometimes vibrant here or dull there, now vigorous and natural, or else sophisticated and recondite or at times sublime or crude.

U.R. Ananthamurthy (Ananthamurthy 1997), presenting almost a similar view, says that the recent studies in different literatures have shown that there was a steady stream of creative expression in all parts of India during the period between AD 1100 and AD 1800. What K. Ayyappa Panikar (Panikar 1997: xxv) establishes is that the very notion of "medieval" may vary from language to language, since the ideas of time, origin, roots, etc. are highly flexible and perpetually in need of new definitions. Yet there is a clear-cut demarcation around the 11th or 12th century in most of the Indian literatures which seems to spell out a change of direction, a variation of perspective and a shift of emphasis. Even when the date is a little delayed, the shift does occur which one can identify as medieval. Sisir

Kumar Das (Das 2005: 1), on the contrary, shifts the take-off point downwards to 7th century AD but, at the same time, accepts the terminal point as AD 1800. The rationale for choosing these dates, according to him, is that a group of devotional poets, known as Alvars and Nayanmars, emerged around this time in South India. They created a new literature which is distinct from classical traditions, whether of Sanskrit or of Tamil. This is a breakthrough in Indian literary history. The choice of the 18th century as the terminal point is based on several factors, such as the change in the mode of literary transmission, shift in the pattern of patronization, a split in the readership due to the growing influence of English education, and the growth of a new literature that adopted many genres from European literature. However, even if we accept the views of Sisir Kumar Das of shifting the take-off point of medieval India to 7th century, it should only be confined to Tamil because of the development in that language, for the first time in Indian cultural and literary history, of a great popular-cum-devotional literature—the *bhakti* literature which ushered in the medieval period in Tamil in that era. Otherwise, with the emergence of New Indo–Aryan languages roughly in AD 1000, the take-off point of the middle age in literature in the rest of the Indian languages is to be fixed in 11 century AD.

THE LINGUISTIC LEGACY

The signs of linguistic change in Indian society began to be clearly visible from around the sixth century onwards, according to Sisir Kumar Das (Das 2005: 3), affecting as they did the literary scene significantly. The Indian people, composed of diverse racial elements, speak languages belonging to four distinct speech-families—the Austric, the Dravidian, the Sino-Tibetan and the Indo-European or

Aryan. All these four language families or the four main 'language culture' groups of India are also known by the old Indo-Aryan nomenclature as Nishada, Dravida, Kirata, and Arya. Suniti Kumar Chatterji explains that Indian Civilization has elements from all these groups, and basically it is pre-Aryan, with important Aryan modifications within as well as Aryan superstructure at the top. One of the unique things of these four 'language cultures' is that one can find in them differences as well as points of similarities. In the four types of speech represented by these four language families, explains Suniti *babu*, there were fundamental differences in formation and vocabulary, in sounds and syntax, but all these languages have lived and developed side by side for 3000 years and more, and have influenced each other profoundly, particularly the Austric, the Dravidian and the Indo-Aryan speeches; this has led to either a general evolution, or mutual imposition, in spite of original differences, of some common characteristics, which may be called specifically Indian and which are found in most languages belonging to all these families, e.g., use of retroflex sounds and post-positions in the declension of the noun; points of similarity in the structure of the verb; compound verbs; echo words; etc. There is genetic diversity in these languages but at the same time, Suniti *babu* asserts, there is an 'Indian character' which forms one of the bases of that "certain underlying uniformity of life from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin", of that "general Indian personality", which has been admitted by an Anglo-Indian scholar like Sir Herbert Risley, otherwise India's claim to be considered as one people has been sceptically discarded by historians like Jadunath Sarkar (Sarkar 1942). Sarkar's model was the model of Western Nation State where unity is based upon a monolithic structure of oneness of culture, language, religion and race but the inner quality of Indian Civilization rests on the element of unity in diversity, and love for harmony as explained so aptly by Ananthamurty:

> If we take the popular slogan, unity in diversity, one will understand that, by overstressing diversity, one begins to see the unity. And if one insists on looking for unity in India, then what one sees is diversity.

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

This model of diversity leading to unity is unique for India. What is revealed through constant exploration is a diverse India, composed of many races, many civilizations, many regions, and many languages. The unique thing is that discovery of each part only leads to the exploration of the other, and ultimately to the whole, which can be viewed in the grand design offered by Mahatma Gandhi in his concept of the "oceanic circle wherein life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom". But it will be "an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual using language with their local, regional, pan-Indian link and national identities", till, at last, the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are an integral unit. It is this solution—unity through acknowledgement of differences—that India has to offer to the world. This cultural plurality contributes to our shared experiences in the field of languages and literature. As a result, the tension between *kshetra* and *desha*, between region and nation, between particularity and universality, between scriptures and *loka vidya* (popular lore) or between written and oral is unravelled by accepting them as complementary to each other. This being the reason, even a word like *desha* means sometimes region or otherwise nation.

There is another term *deshi* (complementary term of *margi*, meaning 'of the land') which is derived from the word *desha*. *Deshi* does not merely mean local colour or regional variation but also of the nature of something raw, innate or unhewn, inherent in the collective entity of a people or, in other words, *loka* which includes both folk and tribal. As such, it has a great bearing on the dynamic interaction between art and nature, between craft and skill, between conscious and unconscious, between sophistication and primordial. Bharata (2nd BC to 2nd AD) recognized *pravritti* or regional distinctiveness as an intrinsic component of culture and its literary expressions and also in Chap XV of his *Natyashastra*, referred to a group of languages, which we today call oral languages or dialects and hence there can be no discussion on languages and literature without taking into account the rich and vibrant storehouse of knowledge and linguistic diversity of a section of a people, who are *loka* and an inherent part of Indian culture.

Reflecting on different distinct cultural identities and creative expressions in architecture, musical instruments, collective dances, rituals, and also on the valuable knowledge in regard to environment, herbs, plants, flora and fauna, mangroves, water resources and much else and also on the expressions of their oral linguistic diversity, *loka* embodies in the subscription to a holistic world-view. Similarly *kshetra* is represented in the *shastra*-oriented discussions in Indian poetics as *riti* or different modes of literary styles, and is accepted both as regional and universal with reference to the all-encompassing space-time dimension. Hence, Vamana speaks of different styles or *ritis* like 'panchali', 'vaidarbhi, and 'gaudiya' and Rajashekhara adds to it 'vacchomi' (vatsagulmi) and 'magadhi'. Rudrata speaks of a new *riti*, 'latiya' and Bhoja includes 'avanti'.

They are all names of different regions and regional literary styles but in the ultimate analysis, *riti* converges these under a universally existing significance—*kshetras* converging into *desha*—almost like Van Gogh's shoes. Those shoes make you feel that some peasant has worn them. He must have been working in his own field for a long, long time, and his shoes are worn out. You can see the sweat, the labour, the anxiety, the suffering of the farmer who has worn these shoes in a particular field, in a particular set of circumstances. Yet, they are great shoes, with a universal appeal and significance.

ORAL (*LOKA*) AND WRITTEN (*SHASTRA*)

In fact, regionality or *kshetra* and *loka* have a larger implication in understanding ancient and medieval Indian culture till post-Enlightment discourses did not become an indicator of civilization. This could be understood on the basis of the notion of concentric circles representing different regions of India. The first circle is the three classical core regions prevailing during that time consisting of Kuru-pancala (north), Dakshinatya (south) and Gandhara-Valhika (west). This is the Brahminical Sanskritic literary tradition. These three regions are both geographical and cultural regions, but conscientiously they are more cultural rather than geographical, and hence, a book like the *Bhagavat*, created by a Brahmin, on the banks of the Kaveri, cuts across geographical barriers and becomes a property of every region.

The second circle belongs to Anga, Banga, Kalinga, Kashmir and Kambouj, and was incorporated in a selective way into the classical core regions. The notion of *shakti puja* belonging to the second circle, with the passage of time, gets absorbed into the first, and can be taken as one of the examples of selective assimilation. The extremely strict rules imposed on the upper caste stratum reveal a high degree of psychological repression, which accompanies the advance of civilization and, on the other hand, the most characteristic feature of Indian culture reveals the persistent vitality of its folk cultures like various forms of *shakti* worship, particularly belonging to the second regional circle. The ascetic and puritanical Brahminical orthodoxy felt psychologically assured to relate itself with Tantric Hinduism. This is one example of such contacts between the classical creative mind and the culture of excluded peoples and classes.

The third circle belongs to those regions which indicate India's cultural and racial periphery like Naga, Shabara, Dasya and Kirata and are also incorporated to share the making of Indian literature. In this way, classical Sanskrit literature describes, on one side, the core regions, and, on the other, peripheries. The main narrative view-point of Indian literature consists of a classical core trinity, which means that Kulina regions have both a geographical as well as a class entity. But there is no denial of the fact that the periphery in Indian literature and also in the development of languages is very vital, and hence, in Bana Bhatta's *Kadambari*, a chandala girl becomes an important character to weave the story and in Bharavi's *Kiratarjuniya*, Lord Shiva appears as a shabara and by subverting or interrogating norms Somadeva/Kshemendra translates the stories of Gunadhya's *Vrihatkatha* from the peripherial Paisaci language into Sanskrit. These are the examples of contacts between the classical creative mind and the culture of excluded peoples and classes. In the Indian context, the peripherial regions are represented by the oral/folk. Tribal literature, which is not held in low esteem in India, is contrary to the Western concept of great/ little tradition. In the Indian context, the *deshi/margi* or *shastra/loka* contrast, in fact, represents two different expressions of the same tradition, and not of different traditions. They are two poles of the same continuum. These regional literary approaches are not liquidated or co-opted by core regional literary traditions, but assimilated as alternative models of human expressions, or as parts of the whole (Choudhuri 2001: 83-85). In Indian tradition, *loka* (folk) and *shastra* (classical) are always complementary and not binary opposites as in the Western tradition, great and little traditions are. In the introductory chapter of the *Mahabhashya*, Patanjali clearly pronounces "prayukto lokarthah" and accordingly the *loka* is the authority of word, meaning and the relationship between them and not the classical rules. *Loka* is one of the important guides of human behaviour and *loka-mata* (views of common people) constitutes a significant part of behaviour before *nripa naya* (polity) and even the *nigama nicoda* (the essence of the Vedas) and the view of the *prajnavan* (views of the wise). In this way, existing both in *loka* and learned traditions, a text has performed its function as a holy book of ethics for ages with the motive of common people's welfare. Tulsidas said:

> There is no religion except for the well being of others.
> There cannot be a bigger sin than inflicting pain on others.

As one reflects on the area of the oral and written as an intrinsic component of culture, one realizes that all the three major language families Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Austric have helped the variegated and inter-connected dynamics of languages which originated roughly in 9th to 10th centuries AD in which the literature of medieval India flowered. In fact, the time around 9th and 10th centuries is significant in the history of Indian languages, it being the time when most of these languages which are to continue in the modern times, the Indo-Aryan as well as the Dravidian (excluding Tamil which has a continuous literary history since the beginning of the Christian era) emerged as distinct speeches. Some of them, however, had their beginnings, at least in embryonic forms, several centuries earlier. The origin of Kannada, for example, had been traced back to the Halmidi inscriptions datable to AD 575. Most of the other modern Indian languages came into existence only around the 11th century or a little later.

The emergence of languages in medieval India is phenomenal; region after region attests the growth of what had long been a spoken dialect into a language, strong enough to yield literary works. These languages amount to an unspoken challenge to the supreme status enjoyed by the three giants—Prakrit, Tamil and Sanskrit. Though all the *bhashas* (regional languages) cannot be considered only as off-shoots of Sanskrit, Prakrit (Apabhramsha) and Tamil, yet they cannot be dissociated from the literatures of these languages. In fact, from the 10th to 11th centuries onward, people's literature in these Indian languages asserted itself fully, and the fusion of the elite and the folk became more and more common, which implies that these languages developed with the help of different sources. All these 22 or 24 languages (recognized by the Constitution of India and Sahitya Akademi simultaneously) of India are an incontrovertible proof of a cultural entity bound together through different modes of communication—oral, written, visual and performative—and at the same time there is mixing, there are specific identities as also interconnectedness or relationship among these languages. With the entry of the Semitic, Arabic and Persian became a part of Sanskrit, Prakrit and Tamil in influencing these *bhashas* or in the formation of another *bhasha*—Urdu. Although a substantial part of medieval Indian literature was produced in the middle Indo-Aryan period, an equally substantial part of that literature was produced in the New Indo-Aryan period, which is generally considered to have begun around AD 800-900[1]

If in the Indo-Aryan domain the North Modern Indian languages derive distant identities from Prakrit—Shauraseni, Magadhi or Maharashtri or, in other words, from Apabhramsha being the general name of the final phases of the Prakrit languages; in the South the Modern South Indian languages derive their identities mostly from Tamil, which is both an ancient as well as a modern language. The emergence of languages in medieval India is phenomenal; region after region attests the growth of what had long been a spoken dialect into a language, strong enough to yield literary works.

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[1] The linguists consider the period of composition of the Vedic hymns (1500-1200 BC) to the time immediately preceding Gautama Buddha (557-477 BC) as the Old Indo-Aryan (OIA) period. The Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA) period is believed to have extended from 600 BC to about AD 1000 of which 1st MIA period is from 600 BC to 200 BC; transitional MIA stage is from 200 BC to AD 200; 2nd MIA stage covers AD 200 to AD 500 and 3rd and the final stage of MIA is extended from AD 500 to AD 1000. The periodization of literary history does not have an exact correspondence with that of the linguistic history. Although a substantial part of medieval Indian literature was produced in the MIA period and similarly other substantial part in the new Indo-Aryan Period starting from AD 800-900.

PRAKRIT-APABHRAMSHA

The period between the 6th and the 11th centuries is the final stage of the MIA; it is also the final phase of Prakrit languages. Apabhramsha is the general name of the final phases of Prakrit languages and was recognized as a literary language by scholars like Anandavardhana and Rajashekhara. In fact, Rajashekhara (*Kavyam* 3: 68 & 10: 54-56) recognized it as a component of his idea of (Indian) literature, which he described with a metaphor of human figure: where the main body consists of sound and sense, whose face is Sanskrit, arms Prakrit, thighs Apabhramsha, feet Paishaci, etc.

Both Bhamaha (*Kavyal* 1.16.28) and Dandin (*Kavyad* 1.32-37), who belonged to the 6th and 7th centuries respectively, recognize Apabhramsha as a literary language and place it alongside Sanskrit and Prakrit though Dandin, like Bharata calls it the language of the Abhiras. The popularity of Apabhramsha could be ascertained by the very fact that as early as the 5th century, in all probability almost the whole of India, i.e., from Valabhi in the west to Nalanda in the east, and Kashmir in the north to Manyakheta in the south, Apabhramsha was the language in use. By the time it was 10th century, both Pushpadanta (*Mahap*. V: 18.6) and Rajashekhara (*Kavyam* 10: 54-55) described Apabhramsha a as a recognized form of literary expression. However, Sanskrit from which Prakrits have originated remained the most important and accepted pan-Indian language along with various Prakrits as well as Pali of the last stage of MIA period. In the words of T. Burrow (Burrow 1973: 59-60),

> with progress of time the differences between the local dialects grew greater, so that Sanskrit became a necessary bond for the cultural unity of India.... the traditional Prakrits in the later period were as artificial as Sanskrit,

> and did not have the advantage of its universal appeal and utility. For such reason alone Sanskrit was the only form of language in Ancient India, whose cultural unity, far more influential and important than its political disunity, rendered such a language essential.

The Jainas and the Buddhists from the earlier period of their history faced the problem of linguistic choice: whether to adopt a more prestigious scholarly language like Sanskrit or the language which is the mother-tongue of the people. The choice of mother-tongue was certainly responsible for the popularity they had enjoyed among the people. But they, too, did not abandon Sanskrit, like Sanskrit scholars, they developed idioms of philosophical discourses within Pali or Ardha-Magadhi, which were beyond the reach of the masses. The Jainas who resisted the use of Sanskrit and wrote considerable number of hagiographies and philosophical works in Early Prakrit and Apabhramsha, finally gave way to Sanskrit as says Burrow (Burrow 1973: 62), "The Sanskrit of the Jainas is influenced by the language of the earlier Prakrit literature in the same way the Sanskrit of the Buddhists."

According to Suniti Kumar Chatterji (Chatterji 1926: I.82), Apabhramsha is a typical late MIA speech which is younger than the Shauraseni Prakrit used in the dramas. This Shauraseni, which was a spoken language in 3rd to 5th centuries and became a written language in the 6th to 9th centuries, to a greater extent removed from the actual living Shauraseni and confined to high literature only. While this was going on, the current late Shauraseni came to be used in literature by the masses, and then it grew to have a position of its own. As a younger Shauraseni Prakrit, it developed into a 'Shauraseni Apabhramsha' in which gradually a literature was created.

Suniti *babu* (Chatterji 1926: I.82) further says that what happened to Shauraseni, undoubtedly happened to other Prakrits; only the literary counterparts of the 'Apabhramsha' forms of these later Maharashtri—Magadhi, Ardha-Magadhi and the North-Western Prakrit—are now wanting, because the literatures did not exist, at least on a large scale, which is equally likely, with Shauraseni Apabhramsha alone having taken up the whole field for literary purposes. Uddyotanasuri, the author of *Kubalayamala* (AD 778) and Rudrata, a renowned rhetorician known for his *Kavyalankara*, accord great respect to Apabhramsha and place it to a high pedestal along with various literary Prakrits and even mention the numerous varieties of Apabhramsha based on regional differences. By the late 11th century, Nami Sadhu endorsing Rudrata's view not only recognizes three types of Apabhramsha, viz., 'upanagara', 'abhira' and 'gramya', but also mentions many other variants based on regional differences and as we reach the 12th century, the text of *Natyadarpana* refers to it as *desha bhasa* and in that way elevates it to the status of a established and recognized language of the country (Srimali 2008: 470). It is no wonder that this literary language came closest to *bhashas* or modern Indian languages from Bengal to the Punjab and Sind, and from Kashmir and Nepal to Maharashtra. The birth of the prototypes of most modern Indian languages of this geographical horizon was the distinctive feature of the literary scene of the medieval period of Indian literature.

The local differences in middle Indo-Aryan grew more and more pronounced around AD 1000 and this led to the New Indo-Aryan *bhashas* taking shape and being born. According to Suniti Kumar Chatterji, after AD 600 right down to the establishment of 'Turki is rule' in North India in the 13th century, the Shauraseni Apabhramsha was a great literary vernacular of Aryan India. As said earlier, Apabhramsha is the general name of the final phases of Prakrit languages and, as a result, the Punjabi language evolves itself with the help of North-Western Prakrit; Hindi from Shauraseni Prakrit and Bengali, and Oriya and Assamese from the old Prakrit of the Aryan Far East, the Magadhi. Similarly, the other New Indo-Aryan languages all have their Prakrit bases. Kashmiri is different and belongs to Dardic Aryan group. However, very soon it came under the influence of Sanskrit and the later Prakrits, and it became a literary language of some importance in the hands of both Kashmiri Brahmins and Muslims.

TAMIL AND OTHER SOUTH INDIAN LANGUAGES

Along with Sanskrit and several Prakrits and Apabhramshas, the only Dravidian language with a rich classical heritage that was active in the medieval period then was Tamil. From the 10th and 11th centuries, two other Dravidian languages—Kannada and Telugu—made their presence felt in the Indian literary scene. Of the four great Dravidian languages—Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada—Tamil has assiduously preserved its Dravidian character. The other three linked themselves with Sanskrit and lived in full harmony with it, the classical language of Hindu India. Linkage is an age-old tradition of a multilingual country like India and is practised practically by all language speakers. Tamil, according to Suniti *babu* (Chatterji 1963: 26-27), has a unique and a very old literature, and the beginnings of it go back to about 2000 years from now. Malayalam as a language is an off-shoot of old Tamil, and from the 9th century AD some Malayalam characteristics begin to appear but it is from the 15th century that Malayalam literature took its independent line of development. Kannada as a cultural language is almost as old as Tamil; and although we have some Telugu inscriptions dating from the 6th to 7th centuries, the literary career of Telugu started from the 11th century.

These languages, including Tamil, however, were exclusively a part of a particular region of India and not understood much beyond their geographical boundaries. Moreover, within their geographical area there has developed no interlingual speech in the Dravidian family, unlike Hindi. Dravidian speakers, in order to communicate among themselves when they use different speeches not known to both the speakers, fall back upon some common non-Dravidian language as a *lingua franca*. They must use either Sanskrit or any form of Prakrit or Hindi/Hindustani and now in the modern times English. Sanskrit, Prakrits and Apabhramsha languages, on the other hand, had a greater area of operations, and Sanskrit in particular was the most wide spread language, though it was confined to the educated class, especially the Brahmins. Its supremacy, however, was accepted by all the Hindu religious groups and it was taught and cultivated all over India.

However, as compared to Tamil, Sanskrit did not have a broad mass base. Tamil within its own territory, without much of a class distinction, has a greater homogeneity so far as its reading community or audience is concerned. However, as pointed out by Sisir Kumar Das (Das 2005: 7), the whole of the medieval period witnessed tension as well as renegotiation between the language of the elite and the language of the masses, between Sanskrit and the *bhashas*. For example, the tension between Sanskrit and Tamil is quite visible in the medieval period despite the fact that Sanskrit received unqualified support from the kings during the Pallava and Cola periods. The *bhakti* movement, of course, initiated by the Shaiva and the Vaishnava saints, used Tamil with great enthusiasm and Tamil became almost a metaphor of Shaivism.

Shaiva scholars and writers like Saint Meykandar or his disciple Arulnadi or Shivachariyar were great scholars both in Sanskrit and Tamil and, as a result, in the rituals and festivals of the Shaiva devotees, Sanskrit and Tamil have always enjoyed equality. Sambandhar in one of his poems described the Lord at whose feet rest Tamil and 'northern words' (i.e., Sanskrit). There was a split between the Vaishnavas into 'thenkalai' and 'vadakalai' in the 14th century after the death of Sri Ramanuja. The Kanchipuram centre of Srivaishnavism and the works of Vedanta Deshikar championed 'vadakalai' or the northern school, i.e., Sanskrit and the other school centred in Srirangam and around Manavalamamuni who championed 'thenkalai' or Tamil. However, there are some scholars who say that the major conflict was not between Sanskrit and Tamil but only in giving interpretation to the *mantras* (divine chantings). There were other areas, such as Kerala, where Sanskrit did not have any visible tension with Malayalam. The growth of 'maniprabala', a hybrid literary language, consisting of Sanskrit words and the indigenous Malayalam, is a fine example of the response of the literary community of Kerala to Sanskrit. Maniprabala actually means yoga or a combination of *bhasha* and Sanskrit but here yoga means harmonious combination and not just mixing of two distinct linguistic entities that creates aesthetic pleasure in the mind of the 'sahridaya'. However *Lilatilakam*, the 14th century treatise on grammar and rhetoric, insists that though Sanskrit words with Sanskrit inflexions are profusely used in maniprabala, the ultimate effect or the total impression that a 'maniprabalakavya' should create is that of being a Malayala Kavya and not a Sanskrit one (Nair 1997: 301). Sisir Kumar Das (Das 2005: 8) opines that despite several instances of resistance to Sanskrit by the *bhasha* communities, sometimes strong and stringent, they could never eliminate its hegemony. One may not agree with this view of Das as mentioned already that it is more of an age-old practice of linkage that speakers of different languages of India followed and as a result code mixing, or use of more than one language in texts or in conversation, is a rule and not an exception and therefore it is not hegemony of any language of power. It also shows that in spite of the variety of races and languages or of the political and administrative vicissitudes, and disunity and fragmentation which India has suffered, it has such powerful and persistent common traits that its cultural unity has remained intact through thousands of years of her history.

In the medieval period, Kannada literature moved closer and closer to spoken/sung forms and farther and farther away from the formal nature of the work of ancient Kannada literature or from *margi* to *deshi* mode of literature. As a result, vernacularisation of form and content of poetry took place bringing the language close to the common man. During the second half of the 12th century, the rise of a new form of Shaivite faith profoundly influenced the Kannada people known as Vira Shaivas or Lingayats founded by Basava/Basavanna. This development can well be compared with the voices of Kabir and Nanak in the 15th to 16th centuries North India. The language adopted was the *deshi* form, which was easy for the common man to understand and realize the spiritual message of the *vacanas* of Basava. Kannada grammarians and poets have generally recognized two stages in the development of language—an early stage which they called 'hala' or old Kannada and a later stage called 'hosa' or new Kannada. With the advent of the medieval age in Kannada literature, the language changed from 'hala' to 'hosa' and Nripatunga

(9th century) was one of the initiators of this new age language. However, halagannada (old Kannada of ancient time) did not go into oblivion and hence it is reasonable to treat what are now known as halagannada and hosagannada as one stage of the language which possibly formed an earlier stage (Aiyangar 2008: 408).

Telugu language is not as old as it is generally believed to be. It did not take definite shape until the rise of the Calukyas on the east coast in the opening decades of the 7th century when perhaps it was not even known by its present time. Because of the influence of Sanskrit over Telugu found in Nannaya (11th century) and other poets, manipravala style came in vogue during the transitional period of Telugu literature but faded away completely by the 12th century without leading to any full-fledged literary work in that style. But scholarly Telugu seems to have been more deeply influenced by Sanskrit syntax and morphology than the non-scholarly form. There has been, however, a general intelligibility of the scholarly or high style even among the ordinary people. In the 12th century, two Hindu sects became prominent in South India—the Vaishnava Ramanuja sect from the Tamilnadu and the Shaiva Lingayat or Vira Shaiva sect from Karnataka, both of which had their influence on Telugu literature.

With the emergence of modern Indian languages in medieval India, almost a revolution took place which tantamount to an unspoken challenge to the supreme status enjoyed by the three giants—Prakrit, Tamil and Sanskrit—and in due course, all these modern Indian languages gained a distinct identity by bringing a renaissance which constitutes in essence a re-creation of the classics of the ancient period in all of them, particularly the two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*; the *Bhagavat* and other *Puranas* and great mythological or legendry stories leading to the emergence of the most dominant trend of *bhakti* (devotion). In medieval times in these languages, which according to Suniti *babu* were never isolated from each other, for example the works of a particular writer in early Indo-Aryan literature, passed from one area to another, and the language was modified in this movement; the original writer at times came to be regarded as a writer in the new linguistic area where he is taken and adapted and transformed, wholly or partially. Gorakhnath, Vidyapati, Kabir, Mirabai and others are cases in point (Srimali 2008 : 103-04). But this trend of commonness should not be over-emphasized as for instance the development of literature in medieval times in Konkani follows a pattern quite different from that of Manipuri. Though translations from Sanskrit and Bengali into Manipuri, a language of the Tibeto-Burman group, established a close link with Indo-Aryan languages but at the same time the local topography, stories relating to Soraren, the god of rain, Phouibi (the goddess of paddy), etc. became a part of Manipuri literature and also the style of singing the devotional *kirtans* in Manipuri gave it a distinctiveness close to the languages of Tibeto-Burman. Similarly, Konkani presents a picture different from other Indian literatures because of a situation of political turmoil, military incursions and large-scale migrations. The Konkani language influenced by Christian devotional literature exemplified *bhakti* element, which was a dominant feature of medieval Indian literature and which transpired from the medieval Tamil *bhakti* hymns of Alvar poets. However, the avalanche from the south would not have gathered mass and momentum but for the genius of the *acaryas* who actively fostered the upcoming *bhashas* everywhere. *Acaryas*, poets in different parts of the country, sang of their gods in their own language. Anyone who could feel and express in any language could sing of god 'in full-throated ease'. In sum, the *acaryas* rendered a two-fold service to the people: providing a simple format to sing of god and lending status to the local language.

The emerging modern Indian languages including Urdu constitute the voice of medieval India. All had a phenomenal growth and development in the medieval times involving all aspects of life: history, politics, literature, architecture, music, theatre, customs, and beliefs. In short, the whole of culture yielded literature of extraordinary merit.

THE LITERARY LEGACY

There is no doubt that in the field of human expressions during medieval time, like poetry, drama, jyotisa, ayurveda, music, sculpture etc, as says Hazari Prasad Dwivedi (Dwivedi 1998: 209), one could observe a sense of listlessness and lack of dynamism except in the area of devotion to God. This was a very strong sentiment conveyed even before Dwivedi by Kshitimohan Sen (Sen 1929: 3). He said that the inherent energy with its varied manifestation, which was in its full play in different departments of Indian Civilization, began gradually to lose this marvellous power during the Indian medieval age. This age however was again filled up with *prema* (love) and *bhakti* (devotion) when Islamic political power and its spiritual culture appeared in the land.

This is a point of dispute which needs to be argued. There are scholars like Ramachandra Shukla (Shukla 1961: 63) who are of the opinion that when the Hindus were defeated, their temples were destroyed and people had no other choice but to seek shelter in the grace of gods and find a way out to live a life of devotion in that kind of trying situation.[2] Hazari Prasad Dwivedi (Dwivedi 1948: 15), while refuting it strongly, said that the emergence of *bhakti* could not be a consequence of defeat of a nation by the Islamic power. Despair or frustration is not in the nature of Hindu community. Even in those trying times, the inner strength of the community forced them towards an innate development of their selfhood through *bhakti*.[3] The *bhakti* movement has a long history which could be traced to the Samhitas, the Narayaniya section of the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, several *Puranas*, especially the *Vishnu* and the *Bhagavat* as well as some texts known as 'Bhakti Sutras' traditionally ascribed to Narada and Shandilya. More than that in the Uttarakanda of the *Padmapurana*, while delineating the glory of the Lord, the personified *bhakti* says that it was born in Dravida, grew up in Karnataka and wandering through Maharashtra came to Gurjara where it became emanciated and after a long struggle it got back its youth in Vrindavana. The Alvars were responsible for the development of *bhakti* in 6th to 7th centuries AD when no Muslim invasion had taken place.

Kshitimohan Sen (Sen 1929: 164), unlike Ramachandra Shukla, had altogether a different reason to equate the emergence of *bhakti* with the appearance of Islam's political power. The effort of the Hindus was to bring about some kind of rapprochement between the invader Muslims and Hindus through a revival of the very ancient *prema* and

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[2] "Apne paurush se hatash jati ke liye Bhagawan ki shakti aur karuna ki aur dhyan le jane ke atirikta doosra marg hi kya bacha tha?", Shukla 1961: 63.

[3] "Nirasha Hindi jati ka swabhava nahi. Uske bhitar ki shakti use isi swabhavik vikas ki aur thele liye ja rahi thi", Dwivedi 1948: 15.

bhakti of India, which when blended with the intellectualism of the Aryans created the religious spirit of India deeper and broader; in this way, the Mohammedans came to be influenced by this kind of idealism of *jnana*, *prema* and *bhakti*. Inversely, a staunch faith, puritanism and pure monotheism which they brought along with them gradually began to be tinged with the colour of Indian thought.[4] In the process, the Muslim faquirs with their sufi idealism which was quite close to the religious tradition of the *nirguna sant* became a very important part of medieval Indian spiritual vision.

The dominant element of medieval Indian literature was no doubt devotional in spirit and primarily religious, having strong philosophical concerns and also life-negating but at the same time there existed a powerful stream in literature of that time which was life-accepting and attached to the pleasures of mundane life. These two streams in Indian literature of *yoga* and *bhoga* are in complete harmony in the two epics but at the same time, the ideals of asceticism and the concern for a life of detachment is given a greater and prominent role in the medieval religious philosophy. However, it was never devoid of joyous blissfulness. After all, *bhakti* is a celebration of life with the Divine in you. The word *bhakti*, indicating love towards your personal god

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4. Kshitimohan Sen's observation (Sen 1929: 164) in this regard is that in pre-Vedic times long before the advent of Islam, there existed in India *prema* and *bhakti* which gradually gained acceptance among the followers of the Vedas though their rituals and ceremonies kept on playing the major part in their religious life. But on the coming of Islam the Vedic rituals and ceremonies were not only of no use, but a hindrance in the way of bringing out a synthesis of the two religions which could meet only through a revival of the very ancient *prema* and *bhakti* of India.

(*ishta deva*) became the medium of literature of sublimation and attachment, and turned the era attractive and joyful.

The medieval literature in India, irrespective of language, is manifest in one or the other of the following forms:

- *Bhakti*: The poetry of ecstasy
- Philosophy of *bhakti*
- The poets and saints of *bhakti* in *bhasha* literature
- The Siddhas, Nathas, Sahajiyas, Vira Shaivas, Nirgun saints and their poetry of revolt and mystic symbolism
- Sufi mysticism
- The renderings of the epics especially the *Ramayana*
- The *Gita Govindam*
- Secular prose narratives and poetry

BHAKTI: THE POETRY OF ECSTASY

Bhakti or devotion[5] is poetry of connection, poetry that connects the devotee with God. Love is the connecting factor and hence *bhakti* is love. It is not worldly love which binds one into temporality; the love expressed in *bhakti* unbinds one from a worldly state and leads to eternity. It is a joyful openness to an unparaphrasable reality.

A great many-sided shift occurred in Hindu culture and sensibility between the 6th and 9th centuries AD in India, like the great consonantal shift described in Indo-European linguistics. Like other shifts of this kind, it was systematic, began in a small way in a particular locality or even in a particular community and, depending on a whole variety of conditions, slowly spread out from there in waves. This innovation did not universally replace older forms but developed a parallel existence and brought forth an avalanche from the south in the form of *bhakti*.

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[5] While writing this part, I am deeply influenced by A.K. Ramanujan and his seminal book on Indian devotional literature, *Hymns for the Drowning*.

Bhakti poetry was first written in the 6th to 7th centuries AD in Tamil, and appeared in Tamil-speaking areas. From there, as referred to by the *Padmapurana*, it moved to Karnataka and, in Kannada, Pampa wrote *bhakti* poetry. Chronologically then, it flourished in Marathi and Gujrati and later in Rajasthani. This takes us to the 13th century AD, during which it spread within Kashmir. Then, between the 15th and 16th centuries AD, it proliferated into the whole of mid-India, where devotional poetry was mostly written in the Braj and Avadhi languages. Slowly, *bhakti* became a pan-Indian movement when the Oriya, Manipuri, Bengali, and Assamese languages were adopted for writing devotional poetry. *Bhakti* poetry is, in fact, like a stream of flowing oil, *tailadhara*, from vessel to vessel, from verse to verse, from mind to mind, from god to devotee. It was a revolution that took the imagination of people by storm.

As Suguna Ramanathan (Ramanathan 2003) says, *bhakti* is love and faith and humility, as opposed to common forms of discourse that serve to delimit a field, mark off its boundaries, legitimise norms and perspectives. Discourse is the practice of power through language that keeps a society stable, but there comes a point when such a world is felt to be radically insufficient. The heart, disturbed by love, moves towards a point outside the given boundaries and challenges common discourse. Then devotional poets like Kabir, Nanak and Mira and many others cross the boundaries of rules and authority and wander from place to place, as they sing of the love of God.

In traditional cultures like India, context-sensitive facts rule and bind life. The dream is to be free of context and create an alternative paradigm, to reject the current discourse and subvert its value systems. Hence, Krishna is black and not fair. The colour white indicates purity, fair play, power and authority and black is the opposite of that but, in reality, black Krishna possesses all that is divine. He is not a Brahmin of the elite class but is of the cowherd caste, almost a commoner. He is not connected with order, harmony, and the light of the heaven. He is rooted in this earth where, despite in their own, discourse-governed rules are not the most important thing. In fact, by breaking those rules men reach the transcendental state of reality which is the state of freedom from worldly bondage. As soon as Krishna starts playing his flute, the message of love is floated on a flower-scented breeze and all self-control is lost. The *gopis*, the married cowherd women, tear themselves away from home and husband and come running to Krishna, the illegitimate lover (*jaara*).

Paradoxically, in the discourse-governed world, unruliness becomes the rule. Faith breaks the boundaries, stands outside discourse and addresses it in a wholly new and strange way. It is the faith of complete surrender (*atma nivedana*) for union with the non-containable and non-finite, the 'other', the transcendent which the phenomenal world is insufficient to satisfy. Hence, a longing for completeness is the starting point of the devotional mystical way. It is a reversal of *Gita's* model of *svadharma*, *nishkamakarma* and *atmasamarpana*, which is possible only in a state of equableness, harmony and balance or *samadarshanah*.

Here, surrender is the first step, because one does not have the quality of *samadarshanah* without the act of surrender. If the god or transcendent is the great good entire, then the human, a fragment of that whole, longs to be reintegrated, reabsorbed into that whole. As Suguna Ramananthan (Ramanathan 2003) explains, love is a primary, directing force that floods the soul and flows outward towards the other. This intensity and reckless devotion for unqualified surrender to the object of love became sanctified. According to the poetics of *bhakti* it is not *kama* (worldly/physical love) but *prema* (the divine love) which legitimises everything, so nothing is illegitimate or irregular. Guilty love, says a commentator, raised the *gopis* above guilt for it was love for full life, while the so-called pure love of the world is a love murdered by no-life or restricted life. In the process, tradition gets reinforced and is changed into an alternate way of living.

Bhakti is an alternative literary and philosophical way of thought and can be understood within the continuity of contexts:

- Vedic/Upanishadic concepts and symbols.
- *Purana* mythologies and *Gita*.
- Love poetry in Prakrit and Tamil and later on in other Indian languages.

Bhakti poetry grows as an alternative against a background of inexorable contextuality but, at the same time, it espouses both the traditional and the unique.

Bhakti, as a means of attaining god, must be recognized as belonging to the earliest awakening of man to the divine. *Bhakti* arises out of the meeting of Sanskrit texts like the *Bhagavat Purana, Narada Bhakti Sutra, Sandillya Bhakti Sutra*, etc. with mythology but more directly out of the love poetry of Prakrit and Tamil. In the Veda, Upanishads, epics and the *Bhagavad Gita*, the terms belonging to the notion of *bhakti* like *upasana* (worship or to be near the god), *sraddha* (trustfulness), *smaranam* (remembrance), *bhakti* (devotion), and *sharanam* (taking shelter in god) are used more for intellectual discursive interest (or religious practice) than for imaginative creative interest as they are found in medieval *bhakti* literature. Moreover, in the Veda, etc., the *nara*—the mutable, the devotee, the human person is shown as dependent upon *narottama*, the superior man, or *purushottama*, the eternal, who is the goal, master and logo of the world system, the deity towards which the whole creation moves.

However, the partnership between man and deity is not based so much on an emotional level as it is on knowledge and an intellectually dominated, logical *upasana* (worship). A bond of love could be created only when the relation is a one-to-one relation, because *bhakti* is not the flight of the alone to the Alone, but the creation of a relationship where the Lord, by looking at himself in the mirror of his devotee, becomes, indeed must become, the Supreme Being and raises *nara* to the level of Narayana, and then *nara* and Narayana become dependent on each other. When the *Gita* says, 'bhaktya mamabhi janati' (through devotion he comes to know me), it is, in fact, elucidating the concept of devotion where Narayana, Vishnu, Rama or Krishna of the epics are accepted as personal gods who are powerful, protective and divine. By the 6th to 7th centuries AD, these gods had slowly turned into gods of multiplicit intimacies, first in Tamil, although in *Sandhilya Bhakti Sutra* and *Narada Bhakti Sutra* in Sanskrit, an initiative had already been taken to define *bhakti* as 'attachment to god'.

The brilliant inspiration of the Tamil poets enthroned Vishnu or Krishna as the Lover and turned them into the yearning beloved. Playing a crucial role in the background was a strong tradition of Tamil, Prakrit and Sanskrit love lyrics. These lyrics were neither sacred nor religious. Some had a moral thought or religious belief cleverly injected into them but their core is of the earthy nature. The celebration of life in these songs is of stylised romance. With adult, free love as their main theme, they were to be found in Hala's *Gatha Saptashati*, Tamil Sangam poetry and Sanskrit *Subhashitas*, mostly in poems that have a double meaning. Some examples:

> Here sleeps my mother-in-law, like a log;
> Me here, all others there,
> O night-blind traveller do
> not come and fall into my bed,
> *Gatha Saptashati*, 7.67
>
> Having chased the wild boar
> In jungle dark? even your dogs are tired?
> Don't go, sir. There that is my place, where bamboos tall
> attract
> The chubby elephant.
> (*Kuruntohoi* tr Srinivasan 1985: 93)

Most of the poems celebrate love among humans, apparently unaware or unmindful of the hand of divinity and indifferent to the voice of the ascetic. With the passage of time, this erotic poetry became weary. By about the 6th century AD, this staleness showed itself as the inevitable consequence of monotony in theme and treatment. Poets churned out types rather than poems of any individuality. There was no freshness of approach and poetry became rigid by following a set pattern. A theory of 'fitting language' (*tinai*) was vigorously exercised, which further enhanced the inflexibility of the poems. For example, any reference to a parrot or a peacock in a poem depicting love on the plains or sea-shore would be frowned upon, as those birds belong to the hilly region. Cerebration began to displace creativity. Loss of royal patronage was another reason that led to the devaluation of this poetry. The Vedas were on the decline, and Jainism and Buddhism discredited the notion of God; in fact, there was a general sense of confusion all around.

It was in this atmosphere that the idea of God as a personal Being, ready to respond when devotion was intense, captured the imagination of the people.

To look upon God as akin and near to the human was something substantial. It was an exciting idea and the situation could lend itself to ecstasy. It was not necessary to evolve a new poetic form to celebrate love between God and the devotee. It was easily derived from the lyrical love-poetry of the Gatha tradition and Tamil love-poetry but then meaning started emerging differently. The earthen lamp was the same as that which lit the room of the hero and the beloved but now the light pointed towards the sky presenting a new meaning—a transcendental meaning.

In Tamil, the alvar poets, immersed in God, wrote love-poetry of the inseparable union of the devotee and God, which was followed, in the next 800 years, by poets in different Indian languages. It seems to follow that, when a human falls in love with the Divine, the language of love cannot be any different from that which is applicable to mortals. A.K. Ramanujan (Ramanujan 1961: 160) explains this in his book *The Hymns for the Drowning*. He says that in Tamil love-poetry, the flowering tree, the rain, the anxious beloved and so forth were all signifiers for the erotic mood and hence the erotic mood becomes the signified. Now, any sign is a union of the signifier and the signified. In *bhakti* poetry, the entire erotic tradition becomes a new signifier with *bhakti* as the signified. Ramanujan, using Roland Barthes' "Elements of Semiology: Staggered Systems" presents this as a diagram:

Signifier 1 (rain, flowering tree, etc.)	Signified 1 (the erotic mood)	
Signifier 2 (the entire erotic tradition)		Signified 2 (*bhakti*)

Ramanujan says that past traditions and borrowings are thus reworked into *bhakti;* they become materials, signifiers for a new signification just as Picasso fashions a bicycle seat into a bull's head. One can give an example from a Tamil poem of the 9th century AD, written by Manikka Vacakar:

I shall wear the Kornai bloom
And feel the rounded arms of Siva
In embrace; and have him,
And feel dazed in love.
In pure ecstasy I shall stand apart,
Only to pine for his lips so red
Pining within,
I shall search,
Only to think of his feet.

The signifiers of love-poetry are enlisted for a new signification (*bhakti*). The changes are subtle, only a name (Shiva) or a context (feet) can change a profane poem into a sacred one. Or, we can speak of 'framing' the erotic poem in a new context of *bhakti*. The 'framing' is achieved by the presence of a reference to Shiva and his feet.

The bhakta is a sign that is a union of the signifier, the entire erotic tradition, and the signified, i.e., *bhakti*. The signature line (*bhanita* or the name of the poet in the poem) is used to differentiate between worldly love and divine love (*madhurya* or *prema bhakti*). The signature line centres the poem in a locale and a person, says Ramanujan (Ramanujan 1961: 163), relating god to poet, poet to poem and poem to audience. Thus, the poetry is not intended to be general, timeless, abstracted from here and now, but to relate to a present god or a specific audience with whom the poet shares his god, his myths and his *bhakti*. Now, God is no more inaccessible, out of bounds—now he is brought from the temple to stay in the house because *bhakti* poetry is the poetry of sharing, touching, seeing the many in one. The bhakta and the god he worships become one.

It is the domestication of godhood. The experience of *bhakti* is not simply enstasy (withdrawal) nor ecstasy (out of body experience), but embodiment—a partaking of the god. The poet needs to possess the god and be possessed by him. He needs also to sing, to dance, to quarrel, to make poetry, painting, shrines, sculpture, to embody him in every possible way. But, in reality, the god does not come to stay with you. It only hints at truthful living, with God residing in you (Nanak)—and also at the harmony of life which only love can bring.

In *bhakti*, all the arts become also 'techniques of ecstasy, incitements to possession'. So bhaktas are 'crazy', 'mad lovers'; they are possessed. Sisir Kumar Das (Das 1984) explains that the words meaning 'mad' or 'crazy' in almost all the Indian languages in the medieval period attained a new connotation, which is an evidence of the recognition of 'madness' as a significant element in spiritual life. A Baul[6] poet of Bengal sings:

> That is why, brother, I became a madcap Baul
> No Master I obey, nor injunctions, Canons or Custom
> Man-made distinctions have no hold on me now.
> I rejoice in the gladness of the love that wells out of my own being.
> In love there is no separation, but a meeting of hearts forever.
> So I rejoice in song and I dance with each and all.
> That is why, brother, I became a madcap Baul.

In *bhakti* poetry, one hears a new kind of utterance, as Ramanujan explains, that cannot be adequately described by earlier terms. The Vedas are *shruti* or heard or revealed. The *Puranas*, epics and *Gita* are *smriti* or remembered.

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[6] 'Baul' literally means 'a mad person', also ref. f.n. 10.

Upanishad means 'that which is learnt by sitting at the feet of a teacher'. All these terms suggest passive or receptive modes. Bhaktas prefer the active mode. Nammalvar's text is called 'divine utterance' (*tiru-vay-moli*). Manikka Vacakar called his work 'holy utterance' (*tiru vacakam*). Vira Shaivas called their poems *vacanas* or 'saying' and signature lines of the poetry of Mira and Kabir indicate that this is what the poet is doing. Now, the emphasis has shifted from hearing to speaking, from watching to dancing, from a passive to an active mode, from a religion and poetry of the esoteric few to a religion and poetry of anyone who can speak. Ramanujan further says that this shift is paralleled in other religions from non-iconic to the iconic, from the non-local (Supreme Brahman) to local (Krishna), from sacrificial fire rituals (*yajna*) to worship (*puja*) by nearly all. These changes are accompanied by a shift away from the absolute Godhead, the non-personal Brahman of the Upanishads to the gods of the mythologies, with faces, complexions, families, feelings, personalities, and characters. However, *bhakti* poems celebrate God both as local and translocal and especially as the nexus of the two, *saguna* (with attributes) and *nirguna* (without attributes). God is the principle of continuity between opposites and differences. God is out there in the universe and also in the temple, as he is in the devotee's heart. He is at the same time the other, in dweller and in the icon.

As Ramanujan (Ramanujan 1985: 132) brilliantly puts it, he is like one's mother tongue; he is accessible everywhere. He is one's own thoughts. God is not spoken of in terms of 'not this, not that' (*neti neti*). He is not seen as beyond language, as ineffable (*anirvacaniya*). His manifold infinity accommodates itself to any language whatsoever. He is the subject of all predicates. So, we have here a religious poetry composed in a first language and a first language that is continuous with the language of one's earliest childhood and family, one's local folk and folklore. By this time, Sanskrit had become the second language, i.e., a language of culture, an inter-provincial *lingua franca*, the preserver and carrier of traditions. The *bhakti* poets were all against the imposition of the elitist Sanskrit language on their *bhashas* (mother tongue) and, hence, poets like Kabir in the north showed his displeasure by saying:

> Sanskrit is standing water of a well.
> Bhasha is flowing water of a river.

In the south, it was Manikka Vacakar who expressed the same feeling:

> We have not seen hearts
> Melt and eyes flow with tears
> When people read the Vedas.
> But when they read the Tiruvacakam even once,
> Black stony hearts will melt
> And tears will flow as from
> Springs in the sands.

In their view, god lives inside us as a mother tongue does, and we live in God as we live in language—a language that was there before us, is all around us in the community and will be there after us. To lose this first language is to lose one's beginnings. Thus, the poet-saints required and created a poetry and a poetics of the mother tongue. They empowered language, the mother tongue, and toned down the influence of Sanskrit, known as the language of gods. So Tukaram says, "If Sanskrit is the language of gods, what then is my language? Is it the language of thieves?" In this way, new sensibility was created by the *bhakti* poets.

In the north, the kings of the Gupta dynasty (AD 320-540) made use of *bhakti* as a political instrument. Their position was low in the caste hierarchy and hence to create a respectable position, they called themselves the devotees of God or Bhagavat. They named themselves in the name of gods, engraved the image of Lakshmi, Vishnu's consort, upon their coins and used mythology, especially the heroic incarnations of Lord Vishnu, in the governance of their empire and also in politics. They sponsored Lord Vishnu and placed a great deal of faith in him as the sponsor of their kingdom. In due course Krishna, with his legends, as the incarnation of Vishnu, emerged with all strength and glory. First, the Hindu temples were built and then coins engraved with Hindu gods and goddesses; this was followed by the creation of Hindu mythologies to give authenticity to *bhakti* and in lieu of the Gupta Empire.

By 5th century AD, Vishnu, Shiva, their consorts, offspring, minions and enemies materialized realistically in the form of a human dynasty. Gupta kings made Sanskrit the state language and added dignity to them. Brahmins blessed them and prepared a genealogical chart of the dynasty. Temples made the presence of the kings felt and revealed their faith in a particular god. In this way Sanskrit, Brahmins and temples enlisted God to pave the way for *bhakti* and the welfare of their kingdom. The god of the temple started sharing sovereignty with the kings. In this, situation of war, change and re-ordering, Sanskrit, religion and mythologies and also Tamil poetry and Prakrit lyric brought *bhakti* into pan-Indian limelight. The most important effect of this movement was the empowering of the language and also of women and the low caste people.

Among other characteristics, the bhakta (devotee) does not show his qualities (*guna*) but just surrenders (*prapatti*). He does not show his learning to achieve the grace of God. One does not earn god's grace; it is always there given in the very nature of the relation. The lord's grace needs no cause and requires no struggle, but needs only an occasion.

Neither learning nor high caste, but their opposite may endear one to God and hence it is poetry of touch, of contact; it thrives on contact and nobody is untouchable or outcaste. It breaks the caste system and attacks the society marked by caste. One can give an example to prove this point. The point is that the Vedic poets were seers. Philosophy is *darshana*, seeing, and the word 'see' occurs in the *Gita* scores of times. The Vedas are heard. Both sight and hearing are senses of distance. But the favourite *bhakti* sense is the sense of touch. The devotee's heart or hands touch, not just the feet of God, but his entire body. This impulse of touch and merging breaks the barriers and distinctions between castes, between touchables and untouchables, between male and female and between sacred and profane.

Bhakti poetry of touching, sharing, seeing the many in the one, is poetry of connections, of continuities. It connects God, gods, and all creation; the God of myth, the God of philosophy, the God in the temple and the God within; speaker, subject, listener, good and evil, hell and heaven, the mythic then and the poetic now, opposites and contraries. The Tamil alvar poet Nammalvar says:

> Before I could say
> 'He became cowherd
> fish
> wild boar'
> He became a million million.

The bhakta in the context of Bhagavan is continuous. He is continuous with the context he is in. This continuity of a context is the very essence of India's literary sensibility and philosophical understanding.

The idea of the complementariness of the opposite was very crucial for the bhaktas. For them, spirituality is complementary to earthliness, *grihastha* (family life) to *sanyasa* (renunciated life). They gather up the small things of earthly life to create a spiritual revolution. Kabir, the medieval Hindi poet, picked up *cunari* (scarf) and *cadar* (clothsheet) and Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, chose seed, irrigation, peasant and tree from the area of cultivation to explain the intricacies of emancipation (*nirvana*).

Nanak gives a practical framework to *bhakti*. He first talks about *Sat*, the one ever-existent unchanging reality, the ontological reality. The whole universe moves on his *hukam*, the cosmic law or *rita*. Nanak then advises us to meditate on this *Sat*. He says that constant remembrance of the name *Sat* is *Satnam*. This is dharma or the duty of one who is seeking *nirvana*. Performing the 'dharma' gives one compassion or *daya* and also satisfaction or *santosh*.

Daya and *santosh* bring balance into life. Ultimately, one has to dedicate oneself to the mercy of the Lord, which leads to nirvana. This framework is based on *bhakti* devotion and is explained in an earthly way. While *bhakti* is anti-theological and also against any kind of conceptual erudition, it is not against *jnana* (knowledge and self-realization) because *dharma* can be known only by *jnana*. The language of *bhakti* is symbolical and it embodies a symbolic act, as the devotee's life, religion and language are all one. It is also an act of celebration and, therefore, they use language to sing and dance and to hear the unheard words in the sound of the kettle drum (*anhata sabad bajanta bheri*), which announces the arrival of the Lord. But for that, one has to empty oneself of ego and desire, only then the *pahun* (guest or Lord) comes to fill you up (*sune ghar ka pahuna*). One's love for the *pahun* or the Lord is not the same as worldly love, which binds one into temporality. The love of *bhakti* unbinds one from the worldly state and leads to eternity.

Man and his body are bound by hundreds of fetters but *prem* (divine love) is a release from this. This release is possible, said Chaitanya, the 15th century saint from Bengal, when one becomes as humble as a straw, shows the fortitude of the tree, takes on self-abasement for the sake of one's fellowmen and constantly remembers the name of God. The dominant note of this love is ecstasy, which is total identity with God. It is not simply eros but a mystic eros. This divine love creates poetry of unbounded liberation. It is like realizing the transcendental self within the limitation of one's worldly existence. This divine love emerges from sensuous love but it turns ultimately into sublime love. It is a poetic approach to religion and an ascetic approach to poetry. Hence, in this poetry one may find the visible and the invisible, the earthly and the ethereal, the body and the soul, all as one and in strange affiliation with each other.

Bhakti is divine play (*lila*) but it is worldly *lila* and hence the symbolism of marriage is a strong poetic device in this poetry. Kabir thinks of himself as the wife of Rama, the Lord. Mira imagines herself as the wife of Krishna, the Lord. The love between Radha and Krishna is very deep but then Radha is a married woman (*parakiya*). It is said that all this is to make the Divine drama intense. It is explained with a profound image: the outside sky is encircled in our houses and rooms but even then it remains limitless. Similarly, in the worldly love of Radha and Krishna, the transcendental divinity remains intact. The medieval *bhakti* adds this new dimension of *lila* (sport), as one of the divine powers and emphasizes this divine aspect of playfulness. In *Gita*, God appears in history to protect the virtuous and to eliminate the evil-doers (*Gita*, iv, 8) but this conception of *lila* is newly added in the medieval times. After all, God appears in the world and according to Krishnadas Kaviraj, 'of all the *lilas* of Krishna the greatest is his *nara lila* (his activities in the human form). The idea of *lila* is the explanation of all events in the life of the individual as well as of the society.' After all, the idea of *lila* or playful spontaneity upholds everything and brings about everything.

This feeling of love is *brahmasvada* itself and not *brahmasvada sahodara*, as the poeticians call the poetic sentiment. The experience of love (*sringara rasa*) in *bhakti* is the experience of an ultimate bliss and not merely like the ultimate bliss. A common poetic sentiment of love like *sringara rasa* cannot be of the nature of the ultimate bliss, the same being governed by the limiting adjuncts of time, space, objectivity, ignorance, etc. It means there is a difference between *sringara*, the aesthetic love, and *madhura*, the divine love. The beauty of flowers used for decoration of a braid of hair of one's beloved and flowers that are offered to a deity are same but not comparable. The effect of both is different because both operate with different memories. But love and worship, human life and divine life, worldly and other worldly, beloved and deity are so much intermingled with each other that it is often difficult to understand when, on the pretext of writing poetry, they worship their deity or when, on the pretext of worshipping their deity, they write poetry. Here, God is also a human person and presents an exposition of natural human love. In this game of love, God descends to be on the same plain with the devotee. Everything pertaining to worldly love is offered to God, as Tagore says, "What we can give to God that we present to our beloved; what we can offer to our beloved, that we give to God. From where shall we get anything else otherwise? God becomes the beloved and the beloved God." In *bhakti*, the mundane meets the spiritual to celebrate life. It is freedom from the bindings of the world. In the small circle of love, one experiences the expanse of the divine. In the limited worldly life of Krishna, the divine is experienced.

Bhakti includes devotion to one's *guru* (teacher). Directly or indirectly through a *guru,* one worships the Lord. It is a strange coincidence that *gurus* or *acaryas* practically all belong to the south of India but the gods are all from the north. It only indicates how this whole movement is used to bind India together culturally.

Acaryas like Madhva and Ramanujan and later on Jiva and Rupa Goswami created the poetics of *bhakti*. *Bhakti* poetry in *bhashas* allows the creation of poetics in the second language Sanskrit. This poetics gives importance to *bhava* (feelings) or *anubhava* (experience) and not to *rasa* (aesthetic bliss), because it is a poetics of personal feeling—a personal and direct dialogue between God and the devotee. Their poems are poems of personal experience and emotion. As the poet is entirely given to his God, he believes in spontaneity that is all possession. Here, the aesthetic end is subordinated to a religious end, a purpose in real life, by a special additional verse called *phala sruti* (a recital of results).

Bhakti is the realization of the limitless infinite in the finite and hence it is not emancipation. It is nearness, it is moving in the same region, it is becoming one and having the same form as that of the god, and therefore it is *saamipya, saalokya, saayujya* and *saarupya*. It fulfils one of the biggest demands of modern times, the sublimation of one's ego and the unity between ecology and the human mind.

Love, as Suguna Ramanathan says, is simultaneously self-giving and selfless; a powerful way of speaking of the soul's longing for union with the ineffable, its desire to give itself and be lost in the other. The final sense is one of coming together. Becoming and being are dialectically united and one becomes that which one loves. The transcendent is brought right into the human world through the love of bhakta. Love creates meaning and touches the world with flame. The birth of God in the heart of the devotee is what matters. As we read this poetry, Krishna is once again present. We hear the flute; we rise and go into a state of ecstasy.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF *BHAKTI*

As it has been said already, *bhakti* is against any kind of conceptual erudition but it is not against *jnana* (knowledge) but the *Bhagavat Purana* specifies about the kind of *jnana*. It speaks about the eternity of Narayana and his identity with Brahman irrespective of whether the universe exists or not and then says that God is inside and outside everything, i.e., "that which is everywhere and at all times i.e. God's *prema bhakti* and this must be the only 'knowledge' which those who endeavour to understand Reality in their own souls should desire to attain (Gonda 1977). Otherwise, Shandilya (*Sh. Bh. Su* 4-6) thinks that mere knowledge does not constitute devotion and persons having no knowledge, e.g. the milkmaids of Vrindavana attained liberation simply through devotion to the Lord. In the literature of this period, there is a strong tension between knowledge and *bhakti* and also between the common man's perception of the mundane world as something real and concrete, and the philosophical understanding of the world as illusory and transient. This kind of a tension was always a part of Indian literary and philosophical history but in no other period was it so powerfully manifest than in the medieval, particularly from the 8th century onward.

The systematization of *bhakti* or the culture of devotion as a philosophical doctrine was initiated by Narada and Shandilya. The *bhakti* doctrines of the Bhagavat or Pancharatra are supposed to be promulgated and codified by Shandilya and Narada in their *sutras* consisting of 84 and 100 or 102 *sutras* respectively. Both these *sutras* are dependent on the *Bhagavat Purana* in their explication of *bhakti*. Narada "has dealt with the subject from the point of view of sentiment alone" whereas Shandilya provides his readers with a theoretical examination of the essence of *bhakti*, of the means of attaining it and the relation between the religious subject and the object of *bhakti*. He feels the necessity of *yoga* or concentration of mind and cultivation of the intellect for the culture of devotion. Shandilya upholds the cult of devotion enlightened by reason. Both these texts are written under the influence of the doctrine of *bhedabheda*—'unity and difference': Brahman is different as well as non-different from the world and the souls.

It is also said by Krishna in the *Gita* (7.17) that of all the devotees, he who ever worships me with knowledge is most dear to me, and no other. *Bhakti*, according to the *Gita*, is the love for God and love reinforced by a true knowledge of the glory of God. It surpasses the love for all things worldly. This love is constant and is centered in God and God alone; it cannot be shaken under any circumstances whether in prosperity or in adversity. It is further said (*Gita* 18.65-66), "Let your mind be constantly directed towards me; be devoted to me; dedicate all your actions to me; prostrate yourself before me; over and above the claims of all *dharmas* (duties) is complete surrender to me and me alone."

The ideological foundations of the medieval Indian literature were provided by two great philosophers—Shankara in the late 8th century and Ramanuja in the 11th to 12th centuries. Both of them raised issues about the nature of Brahman (God) and the nature of the phenomenal world, the relation between God and man, Brahma and *jiva*, etc.

which turned into an abstruse and at the same time common philosophy both of scholarly and rural India. Shankara's theory of Monism says that Brahman is the only Reality and there is no difference between Brahman and *jiva,* which is explained on the bases of the Upanishadic saying 'I am That' (*so'ham*) and then says that the world is an illusion (*maya*), the product of ignorance, because there exists just One, i.e., Brahman and nothing else.

Bhakti is possible only when bhakta and Bhagavan exist and, hence, Ramanujan propounded the *Vishistadvaitavada* (qualified monism) to establish the supremacy of *bhakti,* and challenged the doctrines of Shankara. His theory of *Vishistadvaitavada* or the qualified non-dualism believes in *Saguna* Brahman or God with attributes or that Brahman is identity-in-difference (*bhedabheda*). No doubt God alone exists. He is the Supreme Spirit (*Purushottama*) and, at the same time, he is Lord Vishnu with attributes. He can be realized through meditation and devotion (*bhakti*).The individual selves and the material objects of the world are related to Brahman as parts of a whole (Puligandla 1997: 263). The world is real and not *maya,* and Brahman is the ruler and controller of the world. Brahman with his three attributes, viz., *Satyam* (reality), *jnanam* (consciousness), and *anantam* (infinitude) extends his loving grace to man, which is the only way for salvation. *Bhakti yoga* is the path to receive the grace of the Lord and it consists of *dhyana* (meditation), *upasana* (prayer) and *bhakti* (devotion). It is through *prapatti* (complete self-surrender) that man makes himself worthy of divine grace which, by destroying ignorance, egoism and *karma,* liberates man. Liberation is not effacement of the self but the eternal union with God. Ramanuja has had a great impact on providing a respectful philosophical basis for *bhakti*, thus aligning philosophy with the form of religion practiced by the majority of Hindus. He is credited for recognizing the Tamil devotional works such as the 'Tiru Vaymoli' of the Pariah like Thirupan Alvar as the Veda of the Vaishnavas. Ramanuja can also be credited with spreading Vaishnavism (worship of Vishnu) to the Indian population, and in particular for inspiring the emergence of two subsequent schools known as the northern Vadakalai School, and the southern Tenkalai School, founded by Vedanta Deshika and Manavalamamuni, respectively. These two later schools differed on several interpretations of Ramanuja's philosophy. The most significant point of contention concerned the role of *prapatti* (surrender to God). According to the Vadakalai School, following the rituals prescribed in the Vedas is essential to proper worship. However, the Tenkalai School concerns itself with following the example of the 12 Tamil Vaishnava saints (Alvars), renowned for their devotional poetry. It considers that the act of devotion itself is more important than the rituals surrounding it. Additionally, both schools hold that the grace of Brahman is required to achieve liberation.

Madhvacarya (1199-1278) believed in Dvaita Vedanta and worshipped Brahman in the form of Vishnu. He declared that *bhakti* is the soul in path to liberation and like Ramanujan he believed that it is *prapatti* (complete surrender) and not Shankara's knowledge (*jnana*) of Brahman which leads one to liberation. In Sri Madhva's philosophy of thought, Brahman is Hari (Vishnu) and Hari is Supreme, the world is real and separate from Brahman. This difference (*bheda*) between the Supreme Brahman and the world is real; the individual souls are infinitely graded as superior and inferior and are dependent upon God (Vishnu); liberation is self-realization, consisting in the enjoyment of such bliss as remained latent in the soul; pure *bhakti* (devotion) is the means to this end. But Madhva believes that the liberated self is partially similar to God whereas Ramanuja believes that the self becomes similar to God on liberation. Chaitanya's doctrine is also called the Madhvism of Bengal. It was an offshoot of the Madhva's teaching and was given new life by Mahaprabhu Chaitanya (Sen 1929: 50). Krishnadas Kaviraja (1496-?) in his book 'Chaitanya Charitamrita' in Bengali has furnished Chaitanya's doctrines with philosophical and theological foundation known as Gaudiya Vaishnavism.

The philosophical debate on the question of *bhakti* did not exhaust its potentiality with the activities of the philosophers of the medieval time with Shankara or Ramanuja or Madhva but continued through several centuries, giving rise to the growth of a vast body of philosophical literature and causing finer distinction among the various schools of thought like Nimbarka's *Dvaitadvaitavada* or monism-with-dualism, or Bhallavhacharya's *Pushti-marga* or *Shuddhadvaitavada* or pure non-dualism. Ramananda, a disciple of Ramanuja, brought *bhakti* from Southern India to North India and was the first *acarya* to propagate *prema* and *bhakti* in Hindi:

> *Bhakti* dravir upaji laye Ramananda
> Pragat kiyo Kabir-ne sapta-dvip nau-khand

> *Bhakti* arose among the Dravidians, (in the south); Ramananda carried it (to the north) and Kabir spread it all over (the earth, which consists of) the seven continents and (is divided into) nine parts.

Ramananda was the radical religious reformer of medieval India and was the veritable redeemer of that age.

All these *acaryas* placed *bhakti* over *upasana* and described *bhakti* as *dasya, vatsalya, sakhya, madhurya* and *shanta bhakti,* which conditioned the world-view of saints and poets to a certain degree and had direct relationship with literature produced during that period.

Special mention should be made here of the two followers—Rupa (1591) and Sanatana Goswami (1591)—of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1458-1533) who were destined to become the theologians of this great *acarya* from Bengal. Rupa in his *Bhaktirasammritasindhu* in Sanskrit distinguishes three types of *bhakti*: *sadhana-bhakti, bhava-bhakti* and *prema-bhakti. Prema-bhakti* is the intense form of *bhakti* and is associated with a sense of possession in God and absolute detachment from all other things. Rupa in another insightful text, *Ujjvalanilamani,* from the point of poetics describes the *madhurya-bhakti* or the amorous sentiment by referring to the deep love between Krishna and Radha or *gopis*. The *Haribhaktivilasa* by Sanatana Goswami also in Sanskrit is a detailed manual which still regulates the religious rites of the Bengal Vishnuites. Among the other Goswamis, Jiva (1523-1618) also produced treatises on *bhakti*, particularly his great work *Sat-Sandarbha* founded a new philosophical school of *prema-bhakti* which is the goal of *bhakti*. The saints and poets in their creative writings introduced elements of philosophical analysis of *bhakti* having different dimensions of the religious life and literature of medieval India. This philosophical world is not homogeneous but varied with multiple layers as it is composed of materials coming from different religious sources, not always in harmony with one another but definitely related with the vision of life where God was in its centre. Undoubtedly, the strongest element of the creative life in medieval India is *bhakti* (devotion to God/gods), which defined the place of man in the world.

All human activities, particularly the creative activities, are dedications to God. All human powers, particularly his power to sing and to paint and to create a world of fiction, are essentially gifts of God (Das 2005).

THE POETS AND SAINTS OF *BHAKTI* IN *BHASHA* LITERATURE

In spite of the innate variety and richness, one can discover certain features which link the *bhakti* literature of the era and provide a common perspective. These may not belong to or refer to the same period or even the same century in all the literatures. Certain features are language-specific; certain others are region-specific; only a few are of pan-Indian nature (Panikar 1997: xxviii). Some poets or saints in every language became prominent who were thought of either the originator of powerful trends or as the greatest writers or the authors of the best works in the given language.

In the North-Eastern India, the impact of Sahajayana-Buddhism, Natha-Siddhas and Vaishnavism (separate discussion will follow after this part) was very dominant but the orthodox[7] devotional poets in Assam, Orissa, Manipur, Bengal and Mithila were found to be under the sway of intense love for the Lord whose power and grace, it was thought, could rescue worldly afflicted beings from miseries of the world. Madhava Kandali (14th century), Shankaradeva (1449-1569) in Assam; Vidyapati (1350-1438) in Mithila; Sarala Dasa (15th century), Balarama Dasa (16th century), Jagannatha Dasa (16th century) in Orissa and Jayadeva (12th century), Chandidas (13th century), Jnanadas (16th century) in Bengal composed intensely devotional lyrics where their God-intoxicated passions and emotions, their sense of absolute self-surrender to the Lord are expressed in a dignified and elevated style. All of them wrote in their *bhashas* except Jayadeva, who though wrote in Sanskrit but had, in fact, a tremendous pan-Indian impact among the devotional poets of the medieval period. The greatest singular achievement of Jayadeva, however, is his creation of Radha, who became the central figure in Indian love poetry; in fact, she became the symbol of eternal lover. The later Vaishnava poets, particularly Vidyapati, the great poet of Mithila and Chandidas, the Bengal poet, have added new dimensions to the character of Radha as a suffering woman. Among these saint-poets, Shankaradeva belongs the category of Vallabha and Chaitanya who transformed high philosophy to simple devotion to God, continuous repetition of God's name, singing and dancing for bringing even the common man under the influence of *bhakti* and thus also bringing reforms in the society.

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[7] This is a term used by Kshitimohan Sen

In the south besides Alvars and Nayanmars the authors of Vaishnava and Shaiva cannons like Nammalvar, Andal, Karaikal Ammai (5th century), Appar (590-671), Sambandhar (635-651), Sundarar (7th century), Manikka Vacakar (9th century) and Kamban (9th century) in Tamil, Nannaya (11th century), Tikkana (1205-1288) and Pottana (1450-1510), Yerrapragada (14th century) in Telugu, Ezhuttacchan (16th century), Poonthanam Namputiri (1547-1640) in Malayalam and Sarvajna (16th century), Purandaradasa(1484-1564), Kanakadasa(1508-1606), Kumaravyasa(1430-?) in Malayalam are the prominent South Indian medieval poets who show a deep and fervent humanism, a considerable degree of simplicity and religious tolerance, and a wonder and joy, born out of a full and limitless experience of divine grace. They saw God in all creation and they seem to have considered service to all creatures as service to God. The *bhakti* literature produced in the South is comprised of three great works: i) *Tevaram*, an anthology of poems written by three Nayanmar saints, Sambandhar, Appar and Sundarar and compiled by a Shaiva poet Nampi-Antar-Nampi; ii) *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, anthology of songs composed by all the twelve Alvars and compiled by Nathamuni or Ranganatha Muni and iii) *Srimat Bhagavat* in Sanskrit which emerged in the 10th century out of the religious movement initiated by the Alvars and Nayanmars and a new type of *bhakti*, which is very different from the *bhakti* of *Gita*.

During the 14 to 17th centuries, a great *bhakti* movement swept through Central and Northern and Western India, and poets like Suradas (1487-1584), Mira Bai (1498-1547), Kabir (1440-1518), Tulsidas (1532-1623), Namdev (1270-1350), Nanak (1469-1539), Jnaneshwar (1275-1296), Tukaram (1608-1650), Narsi Mehta (1413-1476), Akha Bhagat (1613-1663) and other devotional poets spearheaded the *bhakti* movement in the north. They thought that people could cast aside the heavy burdens of ritual and caste, and the subtle complexities of philosophy, and simply express their overwhelming love for God. It is generally believed that the Varakari *bhakti* movement, especially because of Namdev, turned out to be the motivating force, for the emergence of the *bhakti* movement in the north. This period was also characterized by a spate of devotional literature in prose and poetry in the Indian *bhashas* like Hindi, Braj, Avadhi, Marathi, Gujrati, Gurumukhi and other languages. Most of these *bhakti* poets focused their attention on Krishna or Rama and there were some who invoked the non-iconic, the One Supreme. In fact a very natural comingling of iconic (*saguna*) and non-iconic (*nirguna*) doctrines can easily be discovered in the poems or songs even of a singular devotional poet which establishes the existence of multiple layers in a single poetic universe. The doctrines are not always in harmony with each other but their peaceful co-existence was not a problem and at the same time in North and Western India one can observe the inter-penetration of Islamic culture in the Hindu or the Upanishadic elements or even Tantrism in Vaishnava doctrines. What characterizes medieval Indian literature of these poets is the polyphony of languages, thoughts and expressions and religious ideas and attitudes, and continuous tensions between various traditions though living in peaceful co-existence which all give it a very distinctive position. Both in form and in spirit medieval India produced a remarkable literature, vibrant and opulent where all human emotions found their due place. The medieval literary world of India regulated by a deep faith in a theo-centric world though it was, it made even the secular and sacred quite often indistinguishable.

THE SIDDHAS, NATHAS, SAHAJIYAS, VIRA SHAIVAS, NIRGUN SAINTS AND THEIR POETRY OF REVOLT AND MYSTIC SYMBOLISM

The 'orthodox' *bhakti* poetry of Krishna-Radha, Rama or Lord Shiva was definitely a revolt against ritualism, caste system and customs; denial of scriptures and defiance against conventions and dissemination of the language of love. All these bhaktas (devotees) whether Shaiva bhaktas of Kashmir or Nayanmars, Alvars, or the devotees of *prema bhakti* of Krishna-Radha or Rama in the north or the north-east believed that one could not be religious by a blind observance of the rules of conduct given in ancient books, and the religious life was a matter of direct personal experience and it has seldom any connection with the narrow conception of the Divinity as found in the ancient institutionalized religion[8] (Das 2005: 21). But these poets maintained a complementary relationship with religious traditions of the past, scriptures and even Sanskrit language in many cases like the use of Sanskrit by Tulasidas and the philosophy which they emulated was of the philosophical texts and scriptures and which distinguished them from the liberals, the mystics, the radicals and revolutionaries.

As informed earlier among the radical reformers of medieval India Ramananda stands foremost in the north and Siddhars in the south. Besides, the heterodox religious sects of the Indian medieval times created an age vastly radical and different from orthodox pan-Indian *bhakti* movement. By giving a new meaning to the traditional path of *yoga* or the various forms of Buddhist Tantric tradition and also Kashmir Shaivism almost a revolution took place in India's devotional universe where Siddhars, Nathas and Siddhas, Vira Shaivas, the Vama marga of Kauliyas and the mystics and the Bauls and many other heterogeneous religious sects, who revolted against the institutionalized shastric approaches to devotion and priesthood, did not show any concern to maintain the orthodox standard of conduct and were to a great extent free from the bondage of *shastras* and dry formalism of Brahmanical system[9] (Sen 1929: 170).

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8. During the several centuries of the existence of *bhakti* tradition, it acquired new nuances, and the flexibility of the earlier years was hardened to a great extent, the spontaneity of the initial stages was gradually replaced by institutionalism, the counter-structures became structures themselves.

9. Kshitimohan Sen, in a review of the work of translation *Pahuda-doha*, an Apabhramsha work, written by Muni Rama-singha, (10th century) refers to some outspoken remarks about the meagre value of the *shastras* and popular form of worshipping the divinity.

Along with Alvars and Nayanmars also emerged a religious group known as Siddhars (7th to 9th centuries), who created an altogether different dimension of the religious life and literature of the medieval India. The Tamil Siddhars, writes T.N. Ganapathy (Ganapathy 1993: 70), may be considered a 'scriptureless' or 'bookless' or 'nirgranthic' school of Hinduism as they are detached from any scriptural authority. K. Zvelebil (Zvelebil 1997: 220) describes the Siddhars as an enigma mainly because of their non-conformist, 'counter-tradition' stance. They denounced many accepted practises, idol worship, rituals and beliefs. They never cared to have a philosophy or any sectarian affiliation. They were isolated because of their non-conformism and exclusiveness and yet the poems that they wrote became extremely popular. One of the earliest Siddhars Tirumular says (Vanmikananthan 1985: 317) in one of his poems:

> In the deeps of the forest
> Moolan sat in meditation
> And saw the sunrise of Self
> Soon disciples flocked to him
> And now and then he spoke a verse
> And these became three thousand
> Defying the march of time
> And the breaking and making of nations
> His Tirumandiram abides with us still

Siddhars in contrast to *bhakti* emphasize knowledge, *jnana* and also body. Tirumular says, "If the body is destroyed, the soul is destroyed," and hence for them the world is real, not an illusion.

The Siddhas and Nathas of the sub-Himalayan region of north-east cover the vast range of the Vajrayani Tantric literary tradition that arose out of the Mahayana Buddhism between 9th and 13th centuries – a period when the tantric practice was in full force in India. Whenever Siddha is mentioned the 84 Siddhas and 9 Nathas are remembered and it is this tradition of Siddha which is known as the Siddha Sampradaya. Siddha is a term used for both Mahasiddhas and Nathas. So a 'Siddha' may mean a Siddha, a Mahasiddha or a Natha. All three terms are used interchangeably. Though the spiritual descent of the sect is said to be from the Divine source, its historical foundation is ascribed to one Matsyendra Natha/Mina Natha. But the greatest of Matsyendra's disciples - indeed one of the greatest souls India has ever produced - was certainly Goraksha Natha. He was a great Siddha, was the father of Hatha yoga in its current form and a great apostle of yogic mysticism in the mediaeval ages.

Sisir Kurma Das (Das 2005: 155) mentions that the teachings of the siddhacaryas are esoteric and only a proper *guru* can initiate the disciples into the mysteries. The spiritual practice is a kind of *yoga*, which involves a detailed knowledge of the body. There are also number of stations in the body and the psychic energy which has its seat below the body stays there in dormant state like a serpent and with the help of yogic meditation it is moved up into the topmost station which is called 'sahasrara' or 'a thousand petal lotus' indicating the union of the self with Shiva or for the Buddhist Siddhas becoming identical with Buddha.

The ultimate goal of the initiative is to attain the state of *sahaja* which is one of great blissfulness. The Buddhist Siddhas are also known as Sahajiya Siddhas. The practice of *sahaja* is popular in Bengal because of numerous ministrel schools like Aul, Baul, Dervish, Sain, Kartabhaja, etc., who differed from one another in their form of expressions and religious exercises but not in their philosophical outlook. According to Atindranath Bose (Bose 1969: 462) it is a path or *panth* which needs no formal conversion in faith. Literally, it is return to what one is born with, i.e. to the divine in man. Love is the central theme of the *sahaja* way. 'Man is above everything, none is higher' (Chandidas). 'God is never equal to living beings' (Krishnadas). 'Highest is *Sat* or Truth but more than *Sat* is the Truthful Living' (Nanak). Every act must be weighed in the scale of human values. The highest of all values is love; and its fountain is in our body.

So, the *sahajiya* springs upon the learner the startling interdict, 'The worship must start with the body of man' (Mukundas). In this mortal frame resides the immortal. The songsters assign a place within the body to all the gods of the diverse sects. The Lord calls upon his devotee:

> Worship me with your body.
> I am love in the shape of desire,
> I am the formless in forms. (*Ratnasara*)

Physical love is an instrument of training for promotion into higher spiritual love. The culture of erotic or physical love under right direction raises it to a higher plane, where the subject finds complete identity with the object, where beauty, joy, and love surpass all empirical limits, where evil, pain, and death lose their atrophic stings. They used *sandhya-bhasha* (twilight language or the intentional language), mostly allegorical or full of riddles and paradoxes as the *caryas* of Bengal.

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism says, live the way he wants you to. But in his idea of *sahaja* there is no place for anything except an urge to meet the *Sat*, the Supreme and hence Nanak further says, I am happy the way you keep me. Your command is my life. Just let things happen by themselves. Do not swim, float. This is the philosophy of *sahaja* in *Adi Granth*. *Sahaja* is the way, the road and when moves on this road, he has to do one thing continuously i.e. to take the name of the Lord. Lord is 'Ek Omkar' and 'Satnam' i.e. his name is to be continuously repeated.

These heterodox religious practices emerged alongside formalistic Brahminic religion but these lovers of God say that their history has no beginning. A Baul[10], as referred to by Kshitimohan Sen (Sen 1929: 68), says that only the artificial religions have a historical beginning, while the religion which is natural and free, is as old as the time itself.

While in a period of rapid rise and fall of kingdom and empires, intrigues, rebellions and mutiny in the 12th century, in the Kannada a *bhakti* movement known as Shaivite *Sharana Bhakti* emerged challenging the caste hierarchy of the social order and formalistic religion and expressed itself mainly through *vacanas* (prose-poems) and *hadugabbas* (sung poems) which became a movement without a parallel. In fact, with Rajaraja Cola conquering parts of Karnataka Kannada Shaivites came to know about Nayanmars and their approach to *bhakti*. With Basavanna, an extraordinary person, a general in the army of Bijjala, who later on captured the Calukya kingdom, founded the Vira Shaiva movement (the Heroic Shaivism). Some say (Chidanandamurtty 1980: 23) the sect was already their though it was not very widely known. As a poet Basavanna fought against all those rules and conventions that suffocated the irrepressible force of what one saw and felt. Though the Vira Shaivas were indebted to the Nayanmars of Tamil Nadu it was not a continuation of the Shaiva thought of Nayanmars. In fact it was a departure and a radical one (Michael 1992: 2-3). The departure is evident in their total rejection of the caste system, refusal to accept the superiority of the Vedas and the Brahmins, rejection of idolatry and the sacred thread. The Vira Shaivas remained "engaged in promoting the goal of universal human welfare and social rejuvenation."

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[10] 'Baul' is a term applied to mystic devotees of medieval Bengal. They still exist and move around different parts of Bengal singing spiritual songs and dancing to the accompaniment of an ektara (one-stringed instrument). They have no caste or communal identities. Although such a devotee may lead a family life, he does not care for earthly riches and his chief occupation is composing and singing and wandering from one place to another.

The *vacanas* meaning 'sayings' are poetic-prose and a new vehicle of thought that consists of short paragraphs or a few short sentences and extremely original and impassioned expressions. Like Basavanna, Allama Prabhu and Yakkamahadevi are extremely revered both as great saints and great poets. In fact, Yakkamahadevi is the finest among all of them. Like Lalladevi (Lalladyad) of Kashmir she threw away her clothing in defiance to the male-governed society and wandered naked covered in her tresses. In one of her *vacanas* (Ramanujan 1973: 129) she says:

> To the shameless girl
> Wearing the white Jasmine Lord's
> Light of morning;
> You fool,
> Where's the need for cover and jewel?

The *Nirguna* (non-iconic) *sants* (saints) came up centuries later but their advent in the North India created a big stir and poets like Kabir, Dadu, Mira, Ravidas, Nanak, Lalladyad and many others spearheaded a revolutionary movement against the establishment. They wrote their poetry couched with mystical symbolism. Lalleshwari (1320-1392) is also known as Lalla, Lalladyad or "Lala Arifa". She was a mystic of the Kashmiri Shaivite sect, and at the same time, a Sufi saint. She is a creator of the mystic poetry called *Vaks*, literally meaning 'speech'. Known as Lalla Vakhs, her verses are the earliest compositions in the Kashmiri language and thus form an important part of the history of Kashmiri literature.

Lalladyad and her mystic musings continue to have a deep impact on the psyche of Kashmiri common man. There is a parallel in the life style of the Kannada and Kashmiri poetesses, Akkamahadevi and Lalladyad. Both gave up family life, wandered about without clothes, defying social norms and spread the gospel of *Jnan*a and worship of Shiva. Akkamahadevi uses the mystic symbolism of the Vira Shaivas and Lalladyad employs the old Buddhist symbolism of river and ferry in her *vaks*.

The unique contribution of Ramananda to Indian spiritual life and to Nirguna Sant philosophy was the spirit of synthesis of the philosophy of *yoga* (meditation) and knowledge with the absolute surrender (*prapatti*) of the *bhakti* cult and rejection of all that was untrue, ephemeral or rigid sectarian; attracted a host of great disciples like Kabir, Dadu, Ravidas and others. Though Ramananda used the popular name of Rama, his god was the one God of love and mercy, without any imperfection, not the unconditional Brahman of the Vedanta, but the beloved, the friend, and the Lord of one's heart. His disciple Ravidas was the worshipper of the one infinite God, who is above and beyond all religious sects and without a beginning or an end. He preached that the Lord resides within the hearts of his devotees, and cannot be known through the performance of any rites and ceremonies. Only one who has felt the pangs of divine love will find Him, and the highest expression of religion in life is service to man. One of the greatest women saints of India, Mirabai, a worshipper of Giradhar Gopal, was later initiated into the worship of the One—the Infinite. Kabir, the central figure in the religious history of medieval India was not in favour of useless mortification of the flesh. He advised:

> Be pure, live a natural and simple life. The whole creation is within your own self, behold creation there. There is no distinction of the outer and the inner, for all distinctions have been harmonized in Him who is beyond all distinctions. In his harmony are truth and realization. (Sen 1969: 382-84)

The most famous of the followers of Kabir's ideals was Dadu (1544-1633) who believed in the value of self-realization, complete surrender to God who resides within the self and through love, devotion and meditation one can realize Him. The path to realization is not so much through prayers but by joining our service to His service to universe. These *sant* poets were mostly illiterate and their devotion include developing love among the different schools of devotion and synthesise them all. This synthesis in spite of all its external difficulties is the true ideal of medieval Indian *sadhana*. The unique thing that happened in the Nirguna Sant movement was that though the Nirguna Sant-poets including Nanak (already discussed above) were against any kind of institutionalization of religion[11] yet they all had authorial identity of a poet and became patron saints of their respective *panths* or sectarian institutions whereas with other poets like Tulsidas, Surdas, Mirabai etc of the medieval period, this sectarian perspective, with its tendency to canonization and even apotheosis, is not so vividly present (Hawley 2005: 11).

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[11] It is said that Kamal, the son of Kabir, who himself was a thinker and a devotee, was requested by the disciples of Kabir, to organize a sect in his father's name; his reply was, 'My father had striven throughout his life against all forms of secterianism; how can I, his son, destroy his ideal and thereby commit his spiritual murder?' It is also said that this remark estranged many of Kabir's disciples from Kamal.

SUFI MYSTICISM

Sufism is the mystical tradition in Islam which can be defined as a practical path of love leading to God, learned from and practised under the supervision of a spiritual teacher generally called a Murshid, Sheikh or Pir. Yet many elements of Sufism are universal features of mysticism, existing long before Islam (Davidson 2003: 115-131). Although the religion to which all Sufis relate is Islam, Sufism is decidedly a case of eclecticism against dogmatism of Islam. Initially though it spread in Iran its origins are obscure. R.A. Nicholson (Nicholson 1914: 9) comments: 'The truth is that Sufism is a complex thing, and therefore no simple answer can be given to the question how it originated.' Like all mystics, a Sufi's knowledge is essentially experiential. His real learning comes through direct experience, not by mere knowledge. The essence of the Sufi message is that experience of God is real; that God is everything and everything is God. Hence it is related that when Rabiah/Rabi (a sufi women from Basra) was once asked, "Do you actually see Him whom you worship?" She replied, "I would not worship Him unless I saw him."

Sufism, as it developed, laid emphasis on spiritual meditation and ecstatic experience. It is monastic in substance, and believes that in essence and attributes God is absolute. As Mansur Hallaj said, 'Ana'l Haqq' (I am Truth), brings it close to the tenet of non-dualism found in Vedantic thought. Mansur spurned the role of a mediator between god and devotee, and believed in personal intuition and mystical ecstasy. He asserted passionately:

> I am He whom I love
> And He whom I love is I
> We are two spirits dwelling in one body,
> If thou seest me, thou seest him.
> And if thou seest him, thou seest us both.

The Sufis aimed at 'fana' which implied total destruction of the ego leading to 'baqa', the fusion of the self with God - an ideology akin to the non-dualism of the Vedanta.

The two corner-stones of Sufism – i) *pir* or *guru* and ii) love–are very much near to the medieval devotional philosophy of *nirguna prema marga*. In this the lover and the beloved or the Murid and Allah become lover and beloved to be identified with each other so that the lover becomes the beloved and the beloved the lover, thus forging a complete fusion of the two into one. God, the creator and macrocosm, is commonly portrayed as an ocean, with man, the microcosm, as a drop or part of that ocean. God is the whole and each part of the creation in some way reflects the whole: man is not merely a drop that can merge with the ocean, but a drop that contains the ocean, a microcosm that contains the macrocosm. The theologians maintained that there could be no love between God and man because there can only be love between like and like, and God is totally unlike any created thing. When the *Quran* speaks of love, it means no more than obedience (Zaehner 1969: 91).

Sufis trace their tradition to Rabiah (d.801), the greatest exponent of a mystical love for God, or Dhu'l-Nun. To quote Zaehner (Zaehner 1969: 91), "For Dhu'l-Nun love is an intense yearning of the soul, and he is not afraid to use the word 'Shawq' meaning 'passionate longing', so to make the meaning clear."

Sufism came to India quite early with the advent of Islam and reached far and wide in the country and made its place along with Buddhism, Jainism and Brahmanical Hinduism with its several variants and regulated the literary production of medieval India. Love and spiritual devotion being the chief tenets of Sufism it had great attraction for the people in India. Sufis, like the Hindu saints, stressed on personal faith and the values of detachment and renunciation. Some of them like Rabiah believed in 'loving devotion' to the Lord - a credo which approximated to the Hindu concept of *bhakti*. According to Vijayendra Snatak though the Sufi ideology in India had Persian roots, it developed some special features of its own. The Indian Sufis recognized four stages (*maqamat*) in the journey of the self to God. The first is 'nasut' (the mundane) when a devotee has to observe the rituals and lead life in accordance with the teachings of the holy *Quran* and *Hadis*. The second stage is 'malakut' (the celestial) in which he tries to rise above the mundane world, purify himself and move further in the spiritual quest. The third stage is 'marifat' (spiritual knowledge) in which, equipped with inner strength, he moves along the path of 'jabrut' (the transcendental) that leads one to God. In the last stage 'haqiqat' (the Reality), he attains Ultimate Truth and realizes 'lahut' in terms of Indian metaphysical equivalents: 'jagrat' (world of manifestation, wakefulness, 'swapna' (world of souls, dreams), 'sushupti' (annihilation of distinction between Thou and I), and 'turiya' (union with the Supreme). He who realizes 'lahut' has an ecstatic experience which is beyond the power of words to describe so says Divani Shamsi Tabriz:

> He comes, a Moon whose like the sky ne'er saw,
> awake of dreaming,
> Crowned with eternal flame no flood can lay,
> Lo, from the flagon of thy love! O Lord,

My soul is swimming,
And ruined all my body's house of clay.

Rizvi (Rizvi 1978: 114) is very emphatic that among the four Sufi orders (Chisti, Suharawardi, Silsila and Firdawsiyya), the Chistiya order of Sufis is essentially an Indian one founded by khwaja Mu'inud-Din Chistie. He died on 16th March 1236 at the age of ninty-six in Ajmer and since then Ajmer became an important Sufi centre.

In the 8th century after Islam was introduced in Sindh and part of Punjab, Sufism became a big attraction and poets like Sheikh or Baba Farid (1173-1265), Shah Hussain (1539-1592), Sultan Bahu (1629-1591), Bulleh Shah (1680-1759) and other Sufi poets, having their equal influence on the Hindus and the Muslims, contributed a lot to the propagation of ethical and spiritual values of life. Sufis and Sikh *gurus*, having some common elements in their belief and faith, were able to work together for the social and religious awakening of the people in Punjab. These Sufi poets reorganized the Punjabi language and gave it a standard form and some of them are known to be architects of modern Punjabi language. The brief sayings of Baba Farid are indeed pearls of wisdom emerging out of his long experience often couched in memorable language and the apt figures of speech:

Don't belittle the dust, O Farid!
No one equals its worth indeed
While we live: 'tis under our feet,
And over our head, when we are dead.[12]

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[12] Tr. by J.S. Neki, *Medieval Indian Literature: An Anthology*, Vol. III, K. Ayyappa Panikar (ed.), 1999, p. 948

In Hindi literature the philosophy of Sufism turned into an ideology of love and a distinct tradition of Sufi epic poetry (Sufi premakhyan kavya) based on the theme of love made the medieval Hindi poetry rich and meaningful. Mulla Daud's *Chandrayan* (1397), Kutban's *Mrigavati* (1503) and Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Padmavat* and other Sufi love epics, mostly written in 'Masnavi' style depict the theme of love and beauty using the story as an allegory to establish the philosophy of Sufism of union of the self with the Supreme.

In Sindhi, poets like Sachal Sarmast have exercised their undying influence by expounding truth and beauty through music and dance and made Sind the chosen place for Sufism. Infact, Rumi, the great and celebrated founder of the Vedantic type of Sufism in Islam introduced 'sama', a particular type of devotional dance as part of Sufism which was later on introduced in India particularly by every Sufi saint in different languages of India.

Sufism reached Kashmir in the 14th century and Kashmiri poetry came directly under the influence of *tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism) of Sufism while the influence of Buddhist *sunyavada*, Kashmiri Saivism, Vedanta and *bhakti* had been already there and all these impacted Kashmiri literature. Nund Rishi (1377-1438) a Muslim by faith added Vedanta to his Sufi ideology in his poetry and created a confluence of various streams of mysticism. His poetry known as 'Shrukh' (*shloka*) is recited as sacred lore, which at times touches the sublime. In his thinking and execution of theme, he is close to Guru Nanak and Kabir.

Amir Khusrau (1253-1325), the father of Urdu literature, was a celebrated Sufi poet, and a disciple of Sheikh Nizam-ud-Din Auliya. He wrote in Persian or Hindi and sometimes mixing both the codes. Khusrau wrote a very meaningful Sufi couplet on the death of his Murshid Nizam-ud-Din Auliya which celebrates the love, that is the fundamental source of Sufism:

> The beloved sleep on her couch with her face covered
> With her curled locks
> Oh Khusrau! Return to your own home for the
> Entire world is now covered by night (Rizvi 1978: 172).

It will not be out of context to mention here the historical significance of the Malfuj literature of medieval India. Malfuz literally means 'words spoken'; in common parlance the term is used for the conversations or table talks of a mystic teacher. It was in January 1307 that Amir Hasan Sijzi, a famous poet of the Khilji period and a friend of Amir Khusrau, decided to write a summary of what he heard from his master, Shaikh Nizam-u'd-din Auliya. The decision was epoch making, so says K.A. Nizami (Nizami 1983: 163), as it marked the beginning of a new type of mystic literature, known as Malfuzat. Amir Hasan's collection of his spiritual mentor's utterances, the *Fawa'id-u'l-Fu'ad,* was welcome in mystic circles and it became a guide book (*dastur*) for mystics anxious to traverse the mystic journey (Khan 1862: 360). It inspired others to render similar services to their masters. The tradition of Malfuz literature was followed by saints of all Sufi affiliations (*silsilahs*): Chistis, Suhrawardis, Firdausis, Shattaris, Quadiris, Maghribis and Naqshabandis. The enourmous Malfuz literature appeared from every part of India. It continued to be produced during Mughal period and became a tradition with mystics of all *silsilahs* to get their *malfuzat* recorded by some of their learned disciples. This kind of literature of Sufi tradition calls for a systematic and careful study with a view to having a glimpse of the life of the common man during the medieval period. To cite one example, one day Sheikh Nizam-u'd-din Auliya saw an old woman fetching water from a well while the Jamuna flowed nearby. 'Why do you take all the trouble?' asked the Sheikh. 'What can I do? My husband is poor. We have no food. The Jumna water is like an appetizer. To avoid hunger we drink water from the well', replied the women. The reply brought tears into the eyes of the Sheikh who arranged regular supply of food to her (Siddhiqi 1356: 123). In this literature the word of advice for all is to 'remember God' under all conditions and to lead a life of rectitude and virtue.

The Sufi quest was for spiritual purity and union with God. It was thought that this could be attained through self-examination, physical and mental discipline, and the life of service. Sufism with its doctrines of self-effacement and Divine Love had a great influence on the medieval Indian literature.

THE RENDERINGS OF EPICS ESPECIALLY THE RAMAYANA

In the medieval time very deep interest was shown by the *bhasha* writers for rendering the human experience embedded in Valmiki's *Ramayana* into their respective *bhasha* and use it as a medium for the propagation of *bhakti*. These renderings became a potential text for new encounters and new contexts. Epic writers of different Indian languages like Krittivas in Bengali, Tulsi in Avadhi Hindi, Ezhuttachan in Malyalam, Kamban in Tamil and others have gone to the theme which proceeds in a circle – separation, conflict, return and again separation to fulfil the poetic obligation. They interpreted it with their own points of view and in the process made it a multi-dimensional book of entertainment and wisdom.

Most of the translation activities the of *Ramayana* from Sanskrit into different emerging Indian languages in the medieval period were not verbatim target languages. Since these translations are connected with text and languages within the same culture, deviations were not only tolerated but also welcomed and encouraged too.

In fact, most of these medieval poets of different languages were scholars of Sanskrit also, and hence there were no inhibitions on their part to deviate from the original text and recreate new episodes and anecdotes because they thought they had the right to add or subtract as these epics belonged to them. The poets/writers attempting *bhasha* renderings of Sanskrit texts treated both the languages as their 'own'. They had a sense of possession in respect of the Sanskrit heritage. The whole medieval *bhakti* movement of poetry in India had the desire of 'translating' the language of spirituality from Sanskrit into the languages of the people. In the process they created a space of creative freedom to produce viable, fully localized texts, especially based on the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavat*. The result was that we have a living translation and not a dead paraphrase with a visible absence of the anxiety of authenticity on the part of these translators.

The appropriation of the story by the *bhasha* writers of the medieval time and then presentation of it in multiple versions display their social aspirations and intellectual concerns. It also informs us about the way different versions subscribe to the epicentral part of the *katha* and also the way the tradition – both *loka* and *shastra* – allows space to divergent versions. All the divergent and even radical versions like the Kashmiri *Ramayana* by Divakara Prakasha Bhatta or the Buddhist version as the *Dasharatha Jataka* and many others are articulated with the energy of folk life. Even a classical poet like Tulsidas valorizes the role of *loka-mata*, (II, 258) as an important guide of human behaviour and without considering it; it is not possible to take a proper decision in crucial moments. In Indian context it is *loka* which talks of social protest, dissent and bitter sarcasm.

Krittivasa (AD 1398-?) and Tulsidas (AD 1530-1623), Ezhuttaccan (AD 1425-1625) and Kamban (9th century) were part of the *Ramayana* tradition in their respective languages. Whereas both Krittivasa and Tulsidas were inspired by Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Ezhuttaccan chose *Adhyatma Ramayana* of Vyasa as his basic text for recreating the Rama story. Though Ezhuttaccan made wise use of Valmiki's *Ramayana* in narrating certain episodes he was primarily inclined to describe the philosophical and devotional aspects of Rama who is mentioned in *Adhyatma Ramayana* as the infallible Brahman unlike in Valmiki where Rama is a superhuman (*Purusottama*) and is described as 'sarvagunapeta naracandrama' but he is not a God. Rama is primarily – acts and suffers like – a glorified human being; a man who is sometimes subject to human foibles but who ultimately through his deed reaches the state of Divinehood.

Kamban's work was shaped by two major literary-religious traditions. He inherited the spirit of Sangam epics and created the pervading humanism of the Tirukural. Secondly, it was the fervour of *bhakti* which swept Tamil-Nadu since the beginning of the 6th century, inspired him to write his great epic.

For Krittivasa and Tulsidas, Rama is Parama Brahman right from his birth and emerges as the God of the devotees, as an *avatara*, who descends in this world in the form of a human being to establish the rule of *dharma* (righteousness) in the society. Hence Tulsidas describes Rama as the *maryada purushottma*, an ideal man, who is an embodiment of truth and morality. Krittivasa transforms Rama into a kind hearted god-like good Bengali youth, admired and adored by his followers and devotees. In the *Ramayana* of Kamban, Rama is a Divine incarnation but more often than not he is also a great human hero.

One may try to find congruency or contradiction in their presentation of godhead and manhood together. In fact in that era of devotional poetry the human life and the divine life, worldly and otherworldly, the mundane and the spiritual were so intermingled with each other that in the small circle of human life, one experiences the expanse of the Divine; in the worldly life of Rama, the Divine is experienced. Ezhuttaccan combines the twin aspects of divinity and humanness without prejudicing either because for him Rama is God in human form (nay *amanusha*). He shows human like behaviour of Rama to prove that he is an ideal for both God and man. If he is more sympathetic and powerful than the gods, he is also more far-sighted and generous than men. This is the uniqueness of Ezhuttacchan's Rama who is superior from the angle of humanity and divinity and the same time one can find a beautiful cohesion of the two aspects of Rama's character.

Krittivas, unlike Tulsi and Ezhuttaccan, seems to be quite proud of his creation because he points out repeatedly that his poetry tastes like nector. Tulsidas, on the contrary presents his work with utmost humility. Though he says that for his own happiness he has created his *Ramayana* but in fact it is meant for the welfare and happiness of many (*bahujana hitaya bhaujana sukhaya*). Tulsi's *Ramayana* begins with the question of Devi to Shiva, 'How are people to be saved in the *Kali yuga*?' Shiva responds to her question by saying that they will be saved by hearing the story of Rama. Hence through the heroic virtues and values upheld by Rama, the poet proposed a new system of values and ideals, based on the Sanatana dharma, the eternal righteous conduct for individuals and the society. The very fact that the *Addhyatma Ramayana* of Ezhuuttacchan is the 'song of a bird' (*kilippattu*) demonstrates that he wanted to be anonymous to prove his humility. In the ancient Indian tradition we see, the humbler the poet and freer he was from an ego and the more he chose to be impersonal. Avoiding conceit was both a means and attainment of spiritual life. His entire text is a Vedantic allegory with accent on the philosophical and devotional aspects.

There are three very distinctive aspects of these three poets which distinguish them from each other. Krittivasa a poet rooted in the soil of Bengal is more inclined to present a harmonious domestic picture of Bengali life. He thinks, to live in harmony is a sign of culture and discord is anarchy. Whereas in Tulsidas the family saga is presented on an enormous canvas and transformed into a text of universal appeal though underscoring the position of *loka* and *loka dharma*. Ezhuttacchan on the contrary makes it a highly philosophical text but at the same time a lively attractive text by infusing in it the splendour of poetic beauty without any erudition.

All these three *Ramayanas* are not translations but transcriptions and constantly go on adding a little here and dropping a passage there, all the while recreating the original texts of Valmiki. By the time Krittivasa, Tulsi and Ezhuttacchan, Kamban and others came to sing the *Ramayana*, the Valmiki's heroic romance with his description of human realities of life, were substituted by *bhakti* or devotion, towards Rama who had, by that time, been deified as an *avatara*. With the result the erotic contexts and the so called crudities in character in Valmiki were obliterated.

The *Ramayana*, as Romilla Thapar says, does not belong to any one moment in history, for it has its own history, which is embedded in many versions, which were woven around the theme at different time and places. But A.K. Ramanujan rightly urges us to view different tellings neither as totally individual stories nor as 'divergences' from the 'real' version by Valmiki, but as the expression of an extraordinary rich set of resources existing, throughout history, both within India and wherever Indian culture took root. Hence all these different tellings retain their own individuality and at the same time are related to each other by their use of *akhyanas* (anecdotes), *upakhyanas* (traditional stories), *samvadas* (discourses) on *niti* (morality), *dharma* (ethics) and the expression of *rasa* as well as by their narration of the story in a leisurely way to become 'a second language of a whole culture area.'

GITA GOVINDAM

Any account of the *bhakti* tradition of the medieval India will be incomplete without a reference to *Gita Govindam* of Jayadeva (13th century). It is significant because it marks the entry of 'nayaka-nayaki bhava' into Sanskrit in lyrical form; besides, Radha, a heroine in folk tradition, becomes enshrined in devotional literature, while Prakrit metre and poetical conventions are employed to lend musicality to Sanskrit and mysticism imparted to the whole work. *Gita Govindam* is a collection of songs connected by a slender narrative of the Divine Love between Krishna and Radha treating it, however, at the human level without suppression or even sublimation. It was Nimbarka, the champion of the Radha cult, who introduced Radha worship in Vrindavana and there is evidence that Nimbarka school of thought spread to the east where it established itself in the Mithila region – one of the seats of culture in medieval times and slowly moved to Bengal, Orissa and Manipur.

As the earliest reference to Radha is found in secular literature e.g. in *Gatha Saptashati* (5.1.89) it can be assumed that though Nimbarka lent status and glory to Radha, as a character of devotional poetry, she as a character in literature actually belongs to Prakrit- a tradition that admits of free and frank expression of amour. That might well have been Jayadeva's inspiration as the style of *Gatha Saptashati* was very much in use in Jayadeva's time when his colleague, Govardhana produced his *Arya Saptashati* in Sanskrit, almost a re-rendering of the original *Gatha Saptashati*. However there is no doubt that because of Jayadeva, Radha became the central figure in the medieval and later love poetry as the symbol of eternal lover. Sisir Kumar Das (2005: 186) is of the opinion that in all probability there was a parallel development of Radha, one in religious literature and philosophy and another in folk literature. Das further says:

> The two streams merged in Jayadeva. In Jayadeva's Gitagovindam, Radha emerges like Aphrodite fully grown and mature. She was there in folk poetry, more precisely among the songs of the cowherds and her tragic tale was told by many poets. It is the imagination of Jayadeva that 'Sanskritized' her and assured her immortality in Indian life and literature.

The passionate love affair depicted by Jayadeva between Radha and Krishna records the various moods of the lovers, their longing for each other, separation and the final union. One can understand Jayadeva's facile oscillation between the profane and the sacred against the background of the Vaishnava tradition where Radha, an archetype of woman in love, is elevated to the status as the divine consort of Krishna. The ambivalence of the poet is very much visible because he wants it to be a secular poem but at the same time he is unable to go against the tradition and creates a poem which emerges from sensuous love and turns ultimately into sublime love. Apparently its structure of a love lyric has given it immense popularity which can be measured by the fact that by the 15th century as many as 132 imitations had appeared on the scene. The devotional romance, with its musical excellence, became widely known within a short period; the palm-leaf manuscripts found everywhere in India: North Gujrat, Darabhanga in Bihar, Jaur in Rajasthan and in Kerela, where it has ever remained as part of temple ritual.

In creating this love poem Jayadeva seemed to imply that love lyrics need not always be apostrophic or impersonal. What the Alvars sought to experience in relation to Krishna, Jayadeva actually experienced while singing about Krishna and his love – a personal experience of love. Thus the poetry is not intended to be general, timeless, abstracted from here and now but to a present God, or a specific audience, with whom the poet shares his God, his myths and his devotion.

In Canto X.19 the poet says: 'So sings Jayadeva, the poet, the spouse of Padmavati' and then the song proceeds:

> Dearest Radha! Oh the Sweet natured one! (says Krishna)
> Punish me with your merciless tooth-bite
> And shackle me with the rope of your delicate arms,
> Inflict me with the intense pressure of your breasts.

One feels it is not Krishna but Jayadeva who is urging Padmavati to join him in the game of love because in the beginning of the poem Jayadeva says that his songs impel Padmavati to dance and he sings this song of love-frolic of Krishna as accompaniment to her dance. Now the whole background is set on two levels:

One is the level of earthly love and other is the level of Divine Game (*lila*) of Radha and Krishna. After all this poem is not only sung but enacted on stage, as created by Bharata in two levels – the higher level is '*ranga sirsha*' or the level of gods and the lower level is '*ranga pitha*' which is the level of human beings. On the stage both the levels coalesce with each other to prove that the devotional poetry is a kind of means between the sacred and the profane, the metaphysical and the physical and thereby it refuses either as absolute priority and suggests that both have certain value and as a result the love of *Gita Govindam* is no longer admitted as subject of a debate whether it was profane or sacred. It became, for Indians, profane and sacred—both at the same time. All that is good and glorious 'outside the temple' (latin: *pro-famum*) deserves to be made an instrument of worship, inside the temple[13].

The later Vaishnava poets, particularly Vidyapati of Mithila and Chandidas, the Bengali poet have added new dimensions to the character of Radha, and built a mythology of Radha as says Sisir Kumar Das (Das 2005: 186), in which she is represented as a suffering woman. But the credit goes to Jayadeva for introducing Radha, the passionate lover of Krishna who became the most towering personality of medieval Indian literature.

SECULAR PROSE NARRATIVES AND POETRY

If the start-off point for the medieval Indian literature is 7th century AD then one could easily include in it the emergence of a new genre in Sanskrit which is normally designated as *gadya-kavya* or romance by the Western scholars. Its origin can be traced in the stories in the Vedic literature and its structure is similar to *Betala Panchavimshati* or *Shuka Saptati*, where several stories are connected by one main story or what is known as chain story configuration. The relation between the tales and the *gadya kavayas* is obvious, but it is true, as S.K. De (De 1960: 205) suggests, " its immediate ancestor is the ornate *kavya* itself, whose graces were transferred from verse to prose for the purpose of rehandling and elaborating the popular tale." One of the best specimens of the *gadya-kavya* is *Dashakumara Carita*, a tale of ten princes written by Dandin (6th-7th century). These tales do not describe a world of pious hermits and noble kings and princesses, but of rakes and rascals, where ascetics can be hypocrites, a Buddhist nun acts as a procuress, and Jaina monks behave irrelevantly, and Brahmins are greedy villains. Though the life represented there is refreshingly down to earth, however coarse and vulgar. Under this category of *gadya-kavya* one can further refer to Subandhu's *Vasavadatta* (AD 414-455), a torturous fairy-tale or a marvel of narrative Bana's *Kadambari* (7th century). Here one can also mention tales and fables, viz Vishnu Sharma's *Pancatantra* (1200 BC to AD 300) or Narayana's *Hitopadesha* (AD 1200) arguably the most original contributions of the Indians to world literature.

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[13] For an illuminating discussion on this, the reader may refer to Lee Siegal, *Sacred and Profane Dimensions of Love in Indian Traditions as Exemplified in the Gitagovinda of Jayadeva*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1978.

Another trend in the medieval times, practically in every language, the poetry of love tales comingled with the philosophy of *bhakti* (both Krishna *bhakti* and Sufi mysticism) was a very popular way of literary expression. The heroic and the romantic either alternately or together are used as subject matter of these love narratives. Malik Mohammad Jayasi (16th century), a Muslim Sufi poet writing in Avadhi Hindi related love tales of human conditions but at the same time using it allegorically to express love for God. All these poets accepted the non-iconic way of worship, but a glimpse of the iconic God was visible in their poetry owing to the acknowledgement of the symbolic style in the description pertaining to God. *Qissa* or tales or Sufi love stories in Punjabi, especially the story of 'Hir Ranjha', and also 'Sassi-Pannu', 'Sohni-Mahival' and 'Shirin-Farhad' came to define a central element in the definition of a Punjabi identity? Glorification of the tragic in love and then allegorically explaining it as love for God, which reflects a mystical doctrine of the love of the self with the Supreme Reality. These stories were composed by many different kinds of people: Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, noblemen and humbler folk, Sufis and courtiers. They were performed, recited, sung and enacted at shrines, village squares, weddings, fairs and as stage productions. Sufi love tales in Sind, particularly of Shah Abdul Latif, were a counter part of the movement of the saint-poets in India. Every heroine of Shah's love tales is the Radha of the *bhakti*-cult. The *mangalakavya* in medieval Bengali literature in praise of certain deities can be defined as a longer narrative poem where the earthly life of a deity is described with the message that if the deity is worshipped with devotion and respect, he would appear as benign (*mangala*) to poets, worshippers and audience. Vijayagupta, Mukundarama and others are poets of this genre which can be termed as poetry of miracle and battle. In Bengali the love tales of Sati Mayna or Lor-Chandrani by the 17th century poet Daulat Qazi are well known which describe Sufi mysticism under the garb of allegory. Similarly Sayyad Alawol (-AD 1673) composed Jayasi's *Padmavat* in Bengali with some Sufi gleanings here and there and made himself very popular in the court of the mong king of Arkan. *Masnavi* or tales in verse in Urdu was the most popular medium of poetic creativity from the 14th to the 16th centuries. These *masnavis* were either simple, secular love tales like *Yusuf Zulaikha* by Hashmi (AD 1697) or *Tutinama* by Ghavvasi (17th century) and *Madhumalati* by Mir Manjhan (16th century) in which all the permutations and combinations possible in a lover-beloved relationship are exploited by poets. The other type was allegorical one embodying ideas on morals and devotional and mystical subjects like *Meraj Nama* by Hashmi and Daud's *Chandain* narrating the tragedy of Karbala.

Baba Kamal was one of the first Kashmiri poets to get inspiration from Persian *masnavi* and wrote his only *masnavi* the *Quisa-i-Habhab* in which he narrates an incident from Islamic history to show how Islam was accepted by the non-believers. Another poet Mahmud (b. 1765) wrote more than ten *masnavis* and out of that the most popular *masnavi* was the *Yousuf-Zulaikha*[14] based on the 11th sura of the *Quran* and it was one of the landmarks in Kashmiri poetry. Not too far back, Kashmiri women deemed it to be their virtue to memorize the whole poem and sing it on occasions of festivity.

Literary versions of popular tales, as exemplified in the above mentioned tales, continued to be current in the 15th and 16th centuries. The standard types of literary tales describing the romance (*premakhyana*) or secular love generally take on a Sufi allegorical or non-iconic *nirguna bhakti* based interpretations. These tales intertwined both the secular and the sacred to create a universe to instruct as well as to entertain.

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[14] The *Yousuf-Zulaikha* written by Mulla Jami in Parsian was translated into Sanskrit as *Katha Kautuka* by Shrivara (c. AD 1426-1486) of Kashmir.

CONCLUSION

The linguistic and literary legacy of medieval India is so voluminous that at times it becomes difficult to fathom it. Relentless activities in every field of human expression created a multilayered universe where, on one side we can see how the emerging modern Indian languages acquired their present linguistic form through continuous changes over the last several centuries and on the other side, we can notice the eagerness of the poets to search for syncretic tradition which operated in medieval India mainly in the folk and liberal spaces. The linguistic texts created in these languages are universal in content but at the same time they indicate the continuity of a tradition that is 'old and is still new.' It is not only the written literary texts that alone were sufficient in understanding the literary milieu of a community in the medieval period but also the memory of a community through which its diverse literary heritage was preserved and that cannot be ignored easily. The emerging modern Indian languages including Urdu constitute the voice of medieval India. The phenomenal growth and development in the medieval times involved all aspects of life: history, politics, literature, architecture, music, theatre, customs, and beliefs. In short, the whole culture yields literature of extraordinary merit.

The medieval Indian literature enriched by several religious and philosophical traditions also had the presence of a new trend, still not vigorous but highly refreshing—the poetry of Buddhist *Sahajiya* and its proximity to real life and nature which is the most sought after tradition of modern India. There was a strong element of realism in the life and the milieu of the regions that surfaced quite often with surprising vividness.

The translations of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* into different Indian languages helped towards the growth of a perception of a unified India despite its political disunity. The concept of unified India is associated with a geography which is both mythical and at the same time real and its interpretation has been a very important feature of the medieval Indian literature.

What is fascinating in *bhakti* poetry is the manner in which medieval India evolved a language of symbolism that became universal. By the time Jayadeva came into scene, Indian symbolism of the bee and the lotus, the mango-blossom or the southern breeze that generates love, the magic of the flute, the inseparable *sakhi*, and the clandestine tryst all turned into pan-Indian conventions of symbolism.

The medieval India enriched by extraordinary religious fervour brought the temples into the centre. The Indian religious life in all periods has been dominated by holy places including temples which meant in the most of the Indian languages 'the house of god'. The *bhakti* movement in the south and less in the north is so intimately connected with the temples that it is not possible to appreciate the background of this great literary and mass movement without realizing their interdependence.

Slowly the temples became frequent metaphors of body in the medieval poetry. Manikvacakar says,

> O king, my body hast thou made thine home.

In Tantric literature the temple is an image of the macrocosm and the microcosm, the cosmic man as well as the inner being of man. Temple as metaphor of body was explicitly and brilliantly elucidated by Basavanna:

> The rich
> Will make temples for Shiva

What shall I,
A poor man
Do?
My legs are pillers
The body the shrine
The head a cupola
Of gold.

Indeed, as says Sisir Kumar Das (Das 2005: 243), the body became a recurrent metaphor of temple in Indian poetry. The poets and saints might have censured the idolatry of temple but they acquired the halo of sacredness and became parts of divinity. The temples were responsible, on one side, in the creation of religious sentiments and, on the other side, the aesthetic dimension was very much displayed especially in the idols of the dancing form of Shiva in the shape of Nataraja or Shiva in deep meditation and also the flute-playing Krishna. Krishna is unthinkable without a flute in the hand. The greatest contributions of medieval period to Indian literature are the two undying images, the dance of Shiva and Krishna playing on its magic flute.

Most of the medieval literatures show a happy blending of the secular and the sacred. In the devotional poetry of India mundane meets the spiritual to celebrate life. The devotional poetry is a kind of means between the sacred and the mundane, the metaphysical and physical and thereby it refuses either world on absolute priority and suggests that both have certain values. This poetry gives the experience of the limitless infinite in the finite. It is nearness; it is moving in the same region and realizing one's transcendental Self within the limitation of one's worldly existence (Choudhuri 2001: 232).

It is this sense of inseparability of *dharma* from the totality of the act of living that brings the mundane and spiritual, the sacred and the profane so close to one another. In this medieval Vaishnava poetry God descends on this earth as a human being to share with us our suffering and turmoil, our happiness and prosperity. Here, man and God, secular and sacred are complementary to each other. The very idea of the sacred in Indian world view presupposes the presence of the Divine or the existence of God in everything visible or beyond our visibility. This is the lead in our understanding of the Vedantic oneness or in other words the existence of One which pervades everything and therefore all is inherently sacred and at the same time all is Divine; and all is one and also many. This understanding infuses a deep meaning in the self and then the self does not ask anything from God – neither wealth, nor long life, nor peace of mind, nothing – the self only asks, as the 16th century Hindi poet Surdas asked from the jewel of all the heroes, Sri Krishna:

> *Chabile! murali neku bajao*
> O! You handsome, continue playing your flute well.

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